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„Stay Safe/Stay United/Stay In Touch”

Community, belonging, and participation in Prague's electronic dance music scene during the
COVID-19 pandemic

Master's Thesis

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Statement


I hereby declare that I have written this diploma thesis solely by myself and I agree with its eventual publication in print or electronic form. All sources and literature have been properly cited. This work has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, July 23th, 2021

Gere Nóra

„I’m here right now:

<https://www.facebook.com/poslouchej.eter/videos/3196048583954015>

join my dance dance ”

(Jan, personal communication, March 27, 2020)

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Abstract

With the social distancing measures related to COVID-19, the party life in the Czech Republic went through gradual changes. Offline parties were no longer possible within the governmental framework. Practices that previously were self-evident became impossible to maintain. Attendees were pushed to rely on the online possibilities of scene participation or invent novel modes to stay connected. Through an analysis of both online and offline participation, this paper examines how their sense of community and belonging to the electronic dance music (EDM) scene changed during the pandemic.

The data was collected via multiple methods. The core of the research is semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, and netnography. Moreover, data from an online questionnaire was used to triangulate and thicken the findings.

While outlining their practices and values that construct, or re-enforce belonging and feeling of community, I provided a critical reading of Olaveson's (2004) theory of „connectedness as collective effervescence/communitas” to see whether it can be a workable frame to analyse the party attendees' scene-related experiences in the extreme conditions of a pandemic.

My research revealed that participants simultaneously utilized and relied on the possibilities of both the online and the offline places. Even though their practices altered through the pandemic, they could be aligned with the notion of „connectedness”. The differences I noted between their pre-pandemic and current participation were rooted in the shaping force of the situation, and not in the change of their values.

Keywords: community, connectedness, COVID-19, electronic dance music, online/offline, participation, practices, values

Introduction

Nobody believed it could happen. It is just a flu, we said. It is not here, but in China, we said. I had my bus tickets to visit home. On Tuesday, 10 March, 2020, I remember sitting in the classroom with my peers, feeling goosebumps on my arm when the teacher says it might happen the university will be closed for a while. It sounded apocalyptic. But it did happen. On 12 March, 2020, the government declared a 30-day state of emergency (later extended until 30 April, 2020, then again until 17 May, 2020). I was thinking about what to do for days. I wanted to go home to my family, but at the same time, I felt safer in the Czech Republic, expecting that people will better adjust to the possible regulations. Then on Thursday, Regio Jet cancelled my bus. It was settled, I stayed. I lived in Kolej Na Větrníku UK at that time. I was alone, radically isolating in a 4x6 meters dormitory room, with a grid on my window (given that it was the ground floor). Separated from my family and friends. My days became one endless flow. Before the pandemic, I often went to electronic dance music (EDM) parties alone. I liked the freedom that came with this choice, and I knew I would have somebody to talk to if I chose to. My interest in electronic dance music is not a decade long story. I am part of the scene since 2018 when I moved to the Czech Republic as an Erasmus student. Before that time, I did not like EDM. I had found it too repetitive and soulless. I had to learn to appreciate it. It was an initiation process for me. Slowly I grew into a regular party-goer, dancing to the beats all night long. Lost in the crowd, being seen yet remaining invisible. The safety that I can be whomever I want, I am welcomed. For a couple of hours, I forgot the mundane, the routine, then I returned with new energy and inspiration. It was important to my well-being and now it was all gone. I found myself in a country where collective dancing overnight became considered an anti-social act. I faced hardships to overwrite my old value system. On the other hand, I was convinced that social distancing is needed to prevent an (even greater) disaster. I knew there are many people in Prague with whom I moved together to the rhythm and who now experience the same. When I discovered Virtual Healing, a Facebook event dedicated to online streams, I was happy. I regularly followed it and invited my friends to join me. We often lamented about how much we miss each other. The surprise was that we similarly missed strangers too. Random smiles from the other corner of the dancefloor. People passing by and complimenting your dance. Then, in the summer, we could reunite with the ravers, unfortunately not for long. The virus was back, the parties were gone. This time was even harder for me because I felt I am losing my sense of what is right and what is wrong. Rules were changing too often and seemed to be arbitrary. I missed dancing. I

stayed in touch with my friends from the EDM scene, but Facebook messages could not substitute in-person meetings. It felt to me that I am not alone with being confused, dance- and crowd deprived. Hence, I decided to dedicate my master's thesis research to reveal how other ordinary electronic dance music aficionados coped with the situation through the pandemic.

Research design and research question

With the social distancing measures related to COVID-19, the party life went through some gradual changes. Offline parties were no longer possible within the governmental framework. Practices that previously were self-evident parts of the rave became impossible to maintain. Attendees were pushed to rely more on the online possibilities of scene participation and invent novel modes to stay connected to their party peers. I am interested in how their sense of community and belonging to the scene changed through the pandemic.

For the inquiry, I adopted inductive, predominantly qualitative research techniques. I entered the field with no clear pre-conception about what I want to prove to exist. I draw on the principles of grounded theory explained by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Emerson (2011, p. 173). The latter argues that those working with this method prioritize the data as the guiding force of the research, as opposed to the pre-existent theory. It means that „the analytic procedures of grounded theory are designed to: [...] Build rather than only test theory.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57). Since my partying practices were substantially altered, I was interested in how others perceived the changes. I wanted to focus on the experience of people who have a similar relationship with the Prague electronic dance music scene: they are party attendees. For this, I first carried out preliminary research in the form of an online questionnaire. I asked about the practices before and during the pandemic, and if respondents attended alternative offline occasions during the lockdown. The differences in the practices before and during the spread of the virus that I discovered helped me to design the questions for my in-person interviews. To participate in the research, I selected individuals whom I knew were similarly involved in the scene as I was. Because of the situational and time constraints, I chose my interviewees in a manner to ease the process of trust-building. These four people: Meesha, Pavel, Jan and Andre are Czechs or living in the Czech Republic for a long time and are familiar with the Prague EDM scene. I was curious about how their pre-COVID-19 experience of community and belonging was affected and altered. When talking about their position in the scene, interviewees revealed their usual cultural practices and values connected to the nightlife. This led me to focus my research on how these changed and could be maintained in the online setting. Furthermore, since my informants continued to engage in semi/illegal scene related offline activities, I extended my interest accordingly. Taking these into consideration, I formulated the following research question: What kind of cultural practices and values can be identified in the online and offline scene participation of

Prague electronic dance music party attendees, that evoke the feeling of community and belonging, and how were these values and practices and thus the feeling of community and belonging affected by measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Theoretical framework – „Connectedness”

Much was written about electronic music and the subculture evolving around it. Journalists balancing between fiction and reality (Stone, 1996), and social scientists approaching the topic from a technical (Gilbert & Pearson, 1999), religious (St John, 2015; Hutson, 1999), media (Thornton, 1995), gender (Gadir, 2017), remembrance (Bennett & Rogers, 2016), linguistic (Vitos, 2010), economic (Kühn, 2015) or design (Wagner, 2017) perspective all contributed to the vast amount of literature on the topic. These are only a few examples, but the list of authors can be extended with many other prominent topics and scholars.

I was considering multiple theories to use as a guiding line to analyse my data. In my view, each of the aforementioned schools of thought has its merits and faults. Therefore I will take segments that I consider helpful in interpreting and contextualizing my findings that they can contribute to the field of anthropology and EDM scholarship.

After the careful analysis and focused coding (Emerson, 2011, p. 191) of my ethnographic data, it was apparent that many of the practices and values I unfolded, echo the findings of Tim Olaveson (2004), who builds his thesis on the concepts of „collective effervescence/communitas” developed by Émile Durkheim (1912) and Victor Turner (1969) respectively, and interprets the Canadian rave scene through the lenses of „experience”. Olaveson sees a lack of any other „big narrative”, which could unite the scene, other than the members’ lived impressions. He coins the term „connectedness” to unite the notions borrowed from Turner and Durkheim, and argues that for the community it is an important quality, a central part of the parties: „A remarkable 77% of raver testimonials sampled reported having experienced feelings of connectedness at raves. A variety of terms were used to describe the experience, such as love, unity, and belonging.” (p. 243). The existence of connectedness can be justified with five criteria: (1) „electricity, exaltation, enthusiasm” (2) „embodied, non-rational, emotional” (3) „communal and collective” (4) „transgressive, leveling and humanizing” (5) „temporary, creative and utopian” (p. 250-257). In Olaveson’s argumentation these five elements are the necessary conditions for a community to experience collective effervescence/communitas. The first one is related to the „altered state of consciousness (ASC)” (p. 259) and the practices of the participants that help them to achieve it. These are mainly drug use-related activities, but the feeling can be present without the intake of substances, the consumption is not an exclusive condition. The second one is also practice-

oriented criteria. It includes activities like dancing or other sensual experiences. The overall exalted emotional state reported by the party attendees falls here too. For „communal and collective” shared emotion, some underlying feeling of „vibe” is needed, the willingness of the participants to engage in the practices of the scene. This one is more value-oriented, and the quality and irresistible power of the music plays one of the main roles, uniting people on the dancefloor. Evidence for the presence of the fourth condition is the desire to belong, which is highly valuable to the scene members, Olaveson argues, despite the „postmodern theory’s (and postmodern culture’s) fetish with ‘diversity’ and ‘individuality’ and its allergy to anything even remotely smacking of universality or a biological foundation for human behaviour” (p. 282). The last criterion is connected to the activities through which the community creates a place that very often can be described with

anarcho-mystic philosopher Hakim Bey’s „temporary autonomous zone” (TAZ). The TAZ, like the rave, is quintessentially liminal or marginal. It occupies the „cracks and vacancies” left by the state, including abandoned industrial complexes—the detritus of Euro-american post-industrial society (p. 287-8).

Visuality is very important, but not alone. The ideology and belief in equality, safety, ecology and helping each other are key principles of this fifth group.

With the guidance of these categories, I examine whether the values and practices reported by my informants and experienced by me during my fieldwork lead to connectedness. Since the COVID-19 restrictions created a unique situation, challenging the previous beliefs and making former activities impossible or illegal, I intend to shed light on the change in the presence of the past principles and exercises to see if collective effervescence/communitas can be found in the novel *modus operandi* of the Prague electronic dance music scene. Furthermore, I intend to provide a critical reading of Olaveson’s theory through the lenses of my data, to see whether it can be a workable frame (as it appears to be) to analyse the party attendees scene-related experiences.

Overview of relevant concepts and literature

In this chapter first I briefly summarize the terms and concepts I find relevant to my research, then I present some of the recent scholarly works written about online participation in the EDM scene during the pandemic. The participants made use of multiple spaces during the period of my research. From physical clubs or other, alternative but legally organised events, they were pushed to rely on mainly online places, or invent new but not necessarily legal ways to stay connected to their peers. The different nature of these platforms affected the connectedness of the informants. To better understand these dissimilarities, I combine the terms „liveness” by Philip Auslander, „online scene” by Tamás Tófalvy and „digital affect cultures” coined by Katrin Döveling, Anu Harju and Denise Sommer. In the following, I provide a brief outline of these terms, among Botond Vitos’s notion of „dementia” and Graham St John’s interpretation of the religious transition experienced at raves, as well as Sarah Thornton’s „subcultural capital”.

„Live” as a distinctive marker of music and performance does not have a long history:

It was the development of recording technologies that made it both possible and necessary to perceive existing representations as “live.” Prior to the advent of these technologies (e.g., sound recording and motion pictures), there was no need for a category of “live” performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility. (Auslander, 2012, p. 3),

however, it changed its reference point many times. For example, today „recorded live” does not sound like an oxymoron, and for the audience and the performer to be present in the same place at the same time is not a condition of perceiving something live. Auslander argues that the process depends on whether the human actors are willing to accept the „claims” of the machines and perceive them as „contemporaneous”: „liveness does not inhere in a technological artefact or its operations—it results from our engagement with it and our willingness to bring it into full presence for ourselves.” (p. 8). This is important to bear in mind when interpreting the participants’ perception of the online events and interaction with other scene members.

Other notions are the „online/offline” and „virtual/real” distinctions. My informants used the „online” and „virtual” as interchangeable to describe the machine-mediated interactions. They also used „real”, when referring to the parties before the lockdowns, sometimes saying „physical” as a synonym. But „offline” was never used by any of them, which is interesting since the online/offline binary is well known to any Internet user, who

has, for example, a Facebook account - being on or offline signals our availability, basically our „liveness” on the platform. In this and the following chapter, drawing on Simão and Guerra (2020, para. 2) and Heřmanský (2020), I argue that online and offline are more complementary than opposing notions, „Moreover, online and offline do not form distinct worlds, but are rather two sides of the same coin (Vieto 2005; Hirzalla and van Zoonen 2011; Beseda 2012; Eklund 2015).” (2020, p. 173), and that the practices my informants engaged in seldom could be described with only one of the pair. For example, when they interacted with friends online they were relying on relationships established offline. Or when they commented below Facebook posts, thus engaging in communication with people they did not necessarily know personally, often used culture-related practices as common references from the offline world. Similarly, when organising offline meetings, they did so using online platforms, and while performing practices offline, they remained connected online too, simultaneously. In my analysis, I will prioritize the usage of „online”, albeit sometimes referring to it as „virtual” to adjust to the word choices of my informants.

And this leads to the next concept I will use: „online scene” by Tamás Tófalvy (2008, 2011). He builds on Will Straw (1991), who introduced the term „scene” into scientific discourse, and argued that practices and groups connected to music genres and activities can not be strictly circumscribed, since they are „interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization” (1991, p. 373); as well as on Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (2004), who distinguished between „local, translocal and virtual” scenes. Tófalvy argues in favour of replacing the term „virtual” and offers a more flexible framework to analyse online phenomenon:

Abandoning „virtual” and the rigid categories, it seems more viable to use a web 2.0 metaphor of „tagging” (i.e. using overlapping sets rather than impenetrable categories) to understand local, global and online arenas organised around a system of preferences for genre spaces, which can be represented and operate in local, translocal, on- and offline contexts. (Tófalvy, 2008, p. 8-9)

He uses the term „online” to nominate the Internet-mediated environment and its interactions. Moreover, he claims that if one wants to use the „online scenes” as a descriptive category for analysis, it can be used with great efficiency only if looked at as an extension of the other two scenes (local and translocal) as opposed to a separate category:

However, I believe - and this is what I wanted to highlight and emphasize with the examples in this paper - that this approach is misleading because the new social

applications do not constitute a scene separated from the offline medium, but on the contrary, by making the boundaries more permeable and accelerating the negotiations between the genres, they give ‘flesh and blood’ people a tool that can radically transform the life of the scene as a whole. (p.36)

He argues that for the online scene to evolve, already existing offline formed assemblages and relations are needed.

These above-discussed notions, in my view, come together in the last term I want to clarify: „digital affect cultures”, coined by Döveling, Harju and Sommer, which they argue:

We understand these as relational, contextual, globally emergent spaces in the digital environment where affective flows construct atmospheres of emotional and cultural belonging by way of emotional resonance and alignment. Approaching emotion as a cultural practice, in terms of affect, as something people do instead of have, we discuss how digital affect culture(s) traverse the digital terrains and construct pockets of culture-specific communities of affective practice. (2018, p. 1)

This explanation first recalls the twofold agency of liveness (machine and human alike), then contextualizes it in the realm of online/virtual reliant on the offline/real. Moreover, the emotional aspect and the often extreme situations bringing it into life, in my opinion, makes „digital affect culture” a possible alternative for Olaveson’s „connectedness”.

To get a deeper understanding of the values and practices of the participants, which are necessary for connectedness to occur, I use Botond Vitos’s (2010) analysis of the motives the Czech psytrance scene is organised around. Drawing on the testimonies of his informants, he labels the central experience „dementia” and situates it in the language and linguistic games played by the party attendees. This particular mental condition affects the emotions of the person as well and is in harmony with Olaveson’s view on altered states of consciousness that are an important part of the collective effervescence/communitas. Besides Vitos, I included the findings of Graham St. John, presented in the papers „Introduction to Weekend Societies: EDM Festivals and Event-Cultures” (2015) and „Electronic Dance Music: Trance and Techno-Shamanism” (2017), about the feeling of transition and the party experience of a loosely connected crowd, where he compares the party to a religious event, thus echoing Olaveson (2004, p. 288).

Nevertheless, the experience is not only black and white. Albeit the EDM scene likes to state its inclusivity, the members often use the „us – them” and „mainstream – underground” binaries to situate themselves on the spectrum of cultures. Building on Pierre Bourdieu (1985), Sarah Thornton (1995) alters the term „cultural capital” and uses it to

describe the practices subculture - in her research electronic dance music - members have to demarcate themselves within the bigger context of culture. Since I could identify these patterns in my data, I found the term „subcultural capital” perfect to contextualize these narratives.

After summarizing the important terms, now I present a selection of literature concerned with similar topics as my thesis. Michelle Lhooq (2020), Lisa Kocay (2020), Samantha Warren (2020) and Chris McGuiness (2020) in their papers reveal how music scenes all around the world responded to the situation generated by COVID-19.

Lhooq presents the financial difficulties musicians and the music industry at large faced, and how they tried to overcome them. She goes on to show, through examples, how promoters engaged in creating safe and affordable online places for „people who can’t attend clubs because they have children, social anxiety, disabilities, or live in places that don’t have clubs” (para. 13).

The theme of Kocay’s paper is one particular place of this kind: Lost Horizon. She investigates how the idea of the VR (virtual reality) music festival was born, and what are the hopes of the organisers concerning its success: “This isn’t just a normal streaming experience—this is a look into the future and a celebration of how we have adapted to globally difficult times.” (para. 2).

Warren’s emphasis, on the contrary, is on the more DIY (do-it-yourself) approach. She, through autoethnography, presents how they set up and managed a live stream session with six other female DJs. She elaborates on gender as a shaping factor in one’s career, the technical and novel challenges they faced: „Poor Jay played for at least half an hour before she glanced at her phone and saw I’d been trying to message to tell her that both her video and audio stream were too stilted and jumpy to continue and we had to move to the next DJ who played for an extra hour.” (p. 3), and how comments connected them with their invisible audiences.

McGuiness takes an analysing look at the EDM scene in India and writes about how different musicians tried to help each other and their audiences overcome the situation. Also, he argues that the pandemic opened new possibilities for music production: „Multiple producers with whom I spoke looked back at these early weeks as a ‘leveling of the playing field’. For them, it was a glimmer of creative cross-pollination that was independent from

hierarchies of the pre-COVID-19 music scene.” (para. 9). However, the online stream does not prove to be as lucrative as the live shows were.

Camille LeBlanc Liederman (2020), Femke Vandenberg, Michaël Berghman and Julian Schaap (2021), Emília Simão and Paula Guerra (2020), Ben Assiter (2020), Dalton (2020), and Sally von Rosen (2020) approached the relation of the pandemic and the scene from the perspective of the participants.

Liederman presents, how the electronic dance music scene in Lithuania often capitalizes on the term „rave”: „It is also a concept that carries specific connotations in a post-Soviet context, namely: something that is illegal and/or something that is about resistance (these things are related).” (para. 6), and presents illegal raves through this insider interpretation.

Vandenberg, Berghman and Schaap carried out similar research as I did. In their paper they unfold the strategies how participants re-enact past practices of offline parties to strengthen their connection to the scene and ritualize their participation:

Ample comments, for example, focus on activities and phrases typically found in a place-based concert: ‘see you at the left of the stage’, ‘do you have a cigarette?’, ‘where is the toilet?’ Despite the fact that participants are watching the livestream from their homes, they persistently keep up conventional dialogue heard during a place-based concert. The arguably ironic undertone of these comments, however, displays that they are not naive to this fact. (p. 5).

They argue that the feeling of collectivity, at least when it comes to musical events, cannot be fully reproduced online.

Simão and Guerra’s analysis is about psychedelic trance parties happening in virtual reality. They conclude their participant observation claiming, that the limitations of these events are the „lack of human warmth, the direct interaction between pairs, the lack of movement and dance ritual, the resignation of the body (not in the sense of alienation or psychedelic experience, but in terms of physical perception) and the lack of multisensory experience. (para. 7).

Assiter intends to unfold how the pandemic reinforced the exclusivity of club cultures and how the financial damage the scene experienced may further deepen these problems instead of solving them:

To be sure, long before the pandemic, streaming had already played a vital role in widening access to club culture. Despite dance music's pervasive discourses of universality and togetherness, access to the club space has often been severely restricted by factors including physical ability, financial status and geographical location (para. 4).

von Rosen's autoethnography investigates a similar problem: the affordances of the virtual parties, albeit from a less socially aware, but more experience-oriented perspective. Her text concludes in the sincere hope in the Berlin party scene going back to the offline venues.

Dalton, using Turner's concept of liminality, alone among the writers presented here, has a slightly more optimistic view on the online parties:

Because the internet is a liminal place that is separate from the physical world and because it does not constitute a tangible realm everything within it exists in a symbolic form (Waskul 2005: 48). As a result of this it does not present its users with an exact replica of society but instead with one in which the people operating within the space have the opportunity to be more flexible in regard to how they communicate and how they represent themselves (Waskul 2005: 48)" (para. 5),

and draws a parallel between the physical and machine mediated parties in terms of both being transitory places.

After presenting the multiple perspectives these brilliant scholars applied to investigate the pandemic's effects on the electronic dance music scene, I continue my paper by addressing the methodology I used to inquire about the problem.

Methodology

Data collection

Entering the field always held unexpected challenges for the ethnographers: diseases, hostility, wild animals, climate and crime. It was the researcher who had to decide whether the work worth taking the risk. In the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing and one's desire to be a responsible citizen were the obstacles. I needed to navigate, to „zigzag between restrictions” (Fuchs2 – Posts | Facebook, 2020) to carry out my investigation. I did not want to put anybody's health in danger. I did not intend to go against the official regulations too openly and too often either. Therefore finding interviewees as well as the fieldwork were challenging. I could not naturally build trust as I would have in the usual party setting. My ambivert personality is suitable to initiate face-to-face interactions, but I felt utterly distressed about asking a favour from people I never met in person. The shortness of time to react to the situation academically and finish the thesis on time made me look for the most self-evident solution. I decided to design my research around a group of friends I knew are involved in the electronic dance music scene of Prague. They represented multiple genres from psytrance to minimal techno, from hardcore to house, therefore could provide nuanced insight into how the virus affected the party attendees practices.

My master's thesis is the analysis of data collected via multiple methods. The core of the research consists of six semi-structured interviews with four participants, fieldnotes made during four events organised and attended by the interviewees, and netnography of Facebook platforms: a selection of crews and venues my focus group's members follow. Moreover the data from my preliminary research is used to triangulate and strengthen the above-mentioned findings.

For this latter investigation I created an online questionnaire consisting of 25 questions: open-ended as well as multiple choice and checkboxes (see Appendix 1.). I divided the survey into three parts in order to match the topics I was inquiring about. The first section was dedicated to parties before the pandemic, the second to the online ones, while the last to the substitute activities. I wanted people to elaborate on their experiences, practices and the aspects of the occasions important to them. They were asked about how often they did participate in the activities, what worked for them and what did not in the online setting and

whether they tried to maintain an in-person connection with their peers. The survey was posted in the Facebook group called „Techno Prague” but got no reaction. Therefore I used snowball sampling to reach people. This way I could gather 19 responses. The questionnaire was anonymous thus protecting the identity of the people and giving them an opportunity to write freely about their (not always legal) actions.

In the course of the in-depth interviews, I followed mostly the same structure (see Appendix 2.). The sessions took place online, using MS Teams. Six interviews were conducted that lasted approximately 40-120 minutes each, the mean being 55 minutes (see Appendix 3.). I asked for participants’ consent beforehand, and I offered them the possibility to state if some information should not be included in the written version. The interviewees could choose to use their real name or a pseudonym. All of them used a nickname, except Meesha, who let me pick whether I want to reveal her name, but I decided not to do so in order to protect her, and because I do not think it has added value for the reader if I revealed it. The interviews happened using English as a common ground, which was nobody’s mother tongue. This may have lead to distortions in the data, but in my view, the context was rich enough to help the understanding even if the expressions used were sometimes not the most accurate, on both sides. The raw data was then transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted into inductively produced categories and themes.

Additional data was collected via participant observation. It was popularised as the core of ethnographic research by Bronisław Malinowski. When analysing his approach, Bernard (2006, p. 345) explains it in the following way: „Spend lots and lots of time in studying a culture, learn the language, hang out, do all the everyday things that everyone else does, become inconspicuous by sheer tenaciousness, and stay aware of what’s really going on.”. The method, given the measures, was complicated to implement. It was straightforward when I attended the live stream with one of the informants (with whom I live together) since there the focus was to experience the legal, social distancing forms of the party experience. Yet things became more intricate when the „substitute activities” were my target to explore. The in-person meetings with my informants were problematic to organise since the risk assessment was different for everybody, and overall there were not many occasions to take part in. One occurrence was the celebration of New Year’s Eve, outside of Prague; the others

took place in the capital: one friendly hanging out in Riegrovy sady, and a house party in the apartment I live.

To further „thicken” the data, I utilized netnography as an additional method. Kozinets (2010, p. 25) describes it as „the ethnography of online groups, studies complex cultural practices in action, drawing our attention to a multitude of grounded and abstract ideas, meanings, social practices, relationships, languages, and symbol systems. All of these disciplines offer complementary and necessary perspectives.” For my analysis, I chose Virtual Healing. It was an umbrella event for live streaming during the first wave of the pandemic, uniting numerous collectives. All my informants knew about it and attended at least one of their occasions, and so did I. This platform was oriented towards more techno-adjacent genres. I wanted to add something from the psytrance side of the spectrum as well, to better cover the various interest of my informants. Therefore I included Unite in my study, which was similarly a Facebook page organising online streams. It did not fit into my initial research design of the Prague scene, nevertheless, I would like to argue that it perfectly served the purposes of my inquiry since I was interested in the activities of my interviewees and the events they followed. Exploring these platforms, I intended to uncover the patterns of the online participation of other party attendees to be able to draw parallels between their and my interviewees’ practices.

Positioning, ethics and possible threats to validity

The question may arise about my objectivity as a researcher. Drawing on Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997), I argue that it is not possible to be completely detached from the subject you are examining. My positionality affects the way I will enter and leave the field, the modes I will present my data and the conclusions I might make. In the case of my master's thesis research, I have to acknowledge my fixed positions first. These mean „age, gender, class, nationality, race - factors that will not change during the course of the study but are often taken for granted and unexamined” (p. 57). I am slightly younger (5-15 years) than the people I carried out my interviews with, therefore I may lack their experiences and knowledge about some aspects of the scene. My gender easily could lead me to favour the perspective of the female members of the group. Class and race were not significantly different during this fieldwork, albeit financial situation and view on related things could differ in given circumstances. My ethnicity, nevertheless, was a crucial factor. I had to design my inquiry to target respondents who were able and willing to use English in my company. As this not always was possible to maintain in bigger groups (for example, at the New Year's Eve party), some loss in information was inevitable.

When it comes to „subjective positions such as life history and personal experiences” (p. 58) I faced several difficult situations. I am not a long time member of the scene, and I have different practices than the rest of my focus group. Using various substances was an activity that made me highly uncomfortable at times, and it was difficult to observe it without being judgemental. On the other hand, „knowing our assumptions and recognizing our stereotypes helps develop tolerance and respect for customs and groups different from ours” (p. 2). The knowledge they shared and their trust was a focal experience.

Furthermore, this latter point leads to the textual position: how close or how far away I focus my research lens and how this affects the way I write about my findings (p. 58). As I stated earlier, my informants are my friends, the time of my research I had an already established relationship with them. This made some things easier, some harder. My work to get access and acceptance into the group was already done. Nonetheless, being emotionally involved required constant awareness. I had to „switch back and forth between the insiders’

view and that of an analyst” (Bernard, 2006, p. 371) and remind myself not to romanticize or neglect information that may stand in contradiction with my expectations.

However, I had to be aware not to include any data which may harm my interviewees. Confidentiality was critical and stated at the beginning of the research. Therefore I used pseudonyms and initials to denote scene members. I believe that it is essential to protect the people you are working with. You have to respect them and stay conscious about the very fact that your research could never happen without them. You are taking their knowledge and time. You enter their privacy. You use them. It is your responsibility as an ethnographer and fellow human to continuously remind yourself about these. You have to implement the information you gained in a way it will not cause any damage (*Position Statement on Ethics - Society for Ethnomusicology*, n.d.). In this sense, I was walking on thin ice since the activities I was taking part in were not always legal. Neither according to general nor the COVID-19 regulations. Nevertheless, I am confident that the participants were analysing the situations before getting involved and never meant to cause any individual or societal loss.

As for validity, even though objectivity in its purest form cannot be reached, I had to be aware of my own biases to „achieve objective—that is, accurate—knowledge” (Bernard, 2006, p. 370) and at the same time of the ones of my respondents. As Gobo argues, there is a „gap between what we say and what we do, between what people think and feel and what they do, between behavior and attitude, between sentiments and acts.” Even though „Presence builds trust. Trust lowers reactivity. Lower reactivity means higher validity of data” (Bernard, 2006, p. 354), I could still see minimal fractures between the narrative and the action of my interviewees. This problem generally arose when the topic was some illicit activity. Respondents then tended to talk using the phrase „other people”, but the observation revealed that they similarly engage in them.

Even though „There is no reason to select a site that is difficult to enter when equally good sites are available that are easy to enter” (Bernard, 2006, p. 356) therefore I do not consider my choice of the field problematic, yet I must be aware of the downsides. The size of my sample due to time and situational constraints is small. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized. They represent the view of a tiny segment of the Prague EDM scene. The data from my preliminary, more quantitative research are used to triangulate and tint the main

corpus. The snowball sampling technique utilized led to the extension of the perspective since the number of respondents is slightly greater in size than that of my interviewees, yet carries the faults of non-representativeness and lack of generalizability. Nonetheless, I am convinced that my findings can serve as a base and reference point for further, more extended research of the problem. As quoted in Jick (1979, p. 608), Glaser and Strauss' (1965, p. 8) summarize their view on triangulation: „The fieldworker knows that he knows, not only because he's been there in the field and because of his careful verifications of hypotheses, but because 'in his bones' he feels the worth of his final analysis.”

In the following chapter, I provide a short presentation of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Czech Republic and the regulations concerning the scene. After that, I outline the history of electronic dance music.

Historical context

The pandemic – and thus everything stopped

„As of 13 March, 6:00 am, all sporting, cultural, religious and other activities both public and private involving more than 30 people are forbidden. This does not apply to meetings of the state administration (e.g. the judiciary, Government meetings, meetings of institutional bodies), or to funerals.”

(Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus | Government of the Czech Republic, 2021)

In the Czech Republic, the COVID-19 pandemic changed reality starting from 12 March, 2020. The declaration of the state of emergency was quickly followed by other news, each bringing additional restrictions. From 13th schools closed. Venues I am following on social media cancelled their events. My Facebook feed was overflowed by posts similar to Ankali (Prague EDM venue)’s:

Concerned with the development of the situation with the spread of COVID-19 in the country and all around Europe we have re-evaluated our decision and we are cancelling both events this weekend. Ankali will stay closed until further notice and we will inform about the rest of the programme accordingly on our website and in all Facebook events individually. Stay positive, the sooner we all take precautions, the sooner we’ll be back on track.” (*Facebook*, 2020)

Society switched to survival mode. We locked ourselves inside our homes. Occasional shopping for groceries and walks in the park were the only options to see other people. It was a situation unprecedented in the life of my generation.

The invisible threat of the pandemic can be associated with mass feelings of panic, fear, and heightened stress (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020; Horesh & Brown, 2020), requiring individuals to be vigilant in adhering to measures to contain its spread (e.g., social distancing) even at the cost of one’s mental health. (Minahan et al., 2020).

These feelings were described by my informants as well, who felt „angry”, „sad” or „had to assess risk and make sense out of the official rules in order to stay sane”. As one of them,

Andre, put it: „We, Millennials, are the golden generation. We experienced no World Wars, nothing something global and frightening like this.” (personal communication, April 11, 2021). The feeling of insecurity and loneliness showed a growing tendency among the members of Generation Y. Jillian Minahan Francesca Falzarano, Neshat Yazdani and Karen L Siedlecki write:

Other work has similarly shown that younger adults report lower levels of well-being (e.g., low positive affect, high negative affect and perceived stress; Klaiber et al., 2020) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This may be due to changes in educational opportunities (e.g., colleges shifting to online learning), diminishing job prospects, and increased financial instability due to the pandemic’s widespread economic impact that may disproportionately negatively affect younger adults. (2020, p. 236).

The stress about shrinking possibilities was combined with the social aspect: hardship to maintain relationships formed at the workplace (similarly valid not only for professional, but personal life), or the lack of possibility to form them because of social distancing, „home office”, and online education:

It has been shown across numerous studies that while these connections can be maintained in a virtual environment, albeit with some erosion of their strength, they are much harder to be established remotely. It for these reasons that bond scores (connection to colleagues) are up to three percentage points lower for Millennials compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers respectively. (Brown, n.d.).

People found themselves forcefully removed from a significant proportion of their social settings. Aristotle said: “Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual.” (‘Man as a Social Animal’, 2012). Belonging to communities is critical for our mental and emotional well-being. I experienced it first hand, and I knew I was not alone.

We lived like this until mid-April when people up to groups of ten were allowed to meet outside. Slowly life seemed to return on track. From 25 May most „restaurants, accommodation services, taxi services, tattoo salons, theatres, cultural and sporting events (limit on number of participants TBC), weddings, indoor expositions of zoological gardens” reopened (*Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus* |

Government of the Czech Republic, 2021). Party life seemed restored, at least outdoors. Masks gradually became bracelets or hidden in the pockets instead of worn. We won!

But it was too early to celebrate. Signs of a second lockdown became noticeable from 1 September, 2020. The government restricted the number of people attending events, and on 5 October declared a 30-day state of emergency, on the 12th „all cultural, sporting and social events, religious services, dance or club events, both amateur and professional” were cancelled „if they bring together more than ten people indoors or twenty people outdoors, unless these are members of the same household”, this regulation was in two days further restricted: „All music, dance, gaming and other social clubs and discotheques must also close. It will be entirely prohibited to consume alcoholic beverages in public.” (*Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus* | *Government of the Czech Republic*, 2021). Venues adjusted to the rule, albeit the news were welcomed with mixed feelings both from the promoters’:

_F2 RESTART/Fears of a pandemic a regrowing and we do understand them./We feel minimal desire to zigzag between restrictions (especially when we think of the competence of their authors. /We’re done trying to produce inside and thinking hard about a safe and appealing reboot./We’re looking for a free model that will keep at least some of the energy of the music scene and entertain bands, their teams, you - and us/Stay Safe/Stay United/Stay In Touch (Fuchs2 – Posts | Facebook, 2020)¹

and attendees’ side:

It makes me so angry that it is completely fine and possible to have people in a pub getting drunk and yelling at each other and for dancing you have to wear face masks, or maybe even not allowed to dance just sit. And it was so hard, this second wave, with six months of winter, when we started to lock down in October, nobody expected that is going to end in the winter, we did not say it but we knew that is going to be fucked fucked. But we survived the lockdown. There was actually higher chance that you would kill yourself than Covid will kill you, at least in your age group, I am 35, almost grandpa, but for you... less than 100 people under 35 died, I think there were more suicides. (Jan, personal communication, June 8, 2021),

¹ Original text of the post: *_F2 RESTART*

Obavy z pandemie sílí a my je chápeme.

Cítíme minimální chuť kličkovat mezi restrikcemi (zvlášť když si o kompetentnosti jejich autorů myslíme svoje).

Končíme s pokusy o produkci uvnitř a usilovně přemýšlíme o bezpečném a přitažlivém restartu.

Hledáme svobodný model, který udrží alespoň část energie hudební scény a bude bavit kapely, jejich týmy, vás - ale i nás

Stay Safe

Stay United

Stay In Touch – Translated by the author.

and the general public appeared to be frustrated as well. Whilst during the first lockdown, citizens made it into the international news because sewing masks for those in need („Czechs Get to Work Making Masks after Government Decree”. AFP, „Thousands of Czech Women Join Forces to Sew Face Masks”. „Stitch in Time”), on 18 October a demonstration took place against the government’s anti-coronavirus restrictions, which „ended in dramatic clashes between protesters and the police after the rally was officially terminated.” causing numerous arrests and injuries (*Police in Prague Clash with Citizens Protesting the Czech Government’s COVID-19 Restrictions*, 2020). However, the situation slowly turned for the better starting from 17 May, 2021. Cultural events, albeit with a limited amount of attendees („up to fifty persons outdoors or ten indoors, under the usual anti-epidemic conditions”), could happen again.

Even so, these 73 weeks left their mark on the world. The cultural sector was hardly hit by the pandemic internationally. Rendell (2020, p. 2) argues:

Unsurprisingly and unfortunately, this had a hugely detrimental impact on many who work in the creative industries. For example, many musicians operate in the existing gig economy that already places them in precarious financial situations (Gross et al., 2018), relying on touring as a dominant source of income.

Similarly, as cited in Jeannotte (2020, p. 3): „Globally, UNESCO estimated that 95% of the world’s museums were closed in May 2020 due to COVID-19 and that the global film industry had lost an estimated US\$10 billion by the end of May 2020 (July 3, 2020. Cult, 2020).” The situation was not better neither in India, as one of McGuiness’s interviewees put it: „It was weird for everyone...especially for those of us making club-oriented music... You know, because we were so used to music specifically to play on a dancefloor and a lot of people didn’t even feel like doing it anymore. So all my arrangements changed, all my moods changed.” (*India’s Electronic Music Scene Under Lockdown | Dancecult*, 2020). Luckily governments offered helping hands:

in many countries, efforts were made to accelerate payments already promised to the cultural sector. For example, arts councils such as the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States, and the Canada Council for the Arts elected to distribute funding to organizations and individuals quickly despite the collapse of planned projects (Canada Council for the Ar, 2020; National Endowment for th, 2020). Similar measures were put in place in Austria, the Czech Republic and Croatia to speed up payments for projects

already approved or delayed by the pandemic (Montalto et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). (Jeannotte, 2020, p. 3)

The government of Czech Republic adopted a cultural package worth more than 1 billion CZK. As stated on their website: „The independent arts segment will receive 440 million CZK, 300 million CZK will go to regional culture support and subsidised organisations in the sector will receive 300 million CZK.”, later they elaborated on the size of the aid:

In Covid – Culture programme, there will be 750 million crowns earmarked for the programme and the support will be provided in the form of ex-post subsidies for expenses incurred in vain for individual cultural events or projects that arose in the decisive period from 1 October 2019 until 20 November 2020 and for expenses in the framework of performed continual activities in the area of culture from the period from 1 March 2020 until 20 November 2020. The organisers can receive up to half of the eligible expenses for postponed or cancelled cultural events and up to 80 per cent of the eligible expenses for continuously developed activities. One subject can obtain a maximum of 10 million crowns, a self-employed person 60 000 crowns.” (*Measures Adopted by the Czech Government against the Coronavirus | Government of the Czech Republic*, 2021)

The help was needed. The venues and their crews, artists relied heavily on the events and the revenue from them. As my informants highlighted, the scene was in trouble: „Yeah, probably people were busy working in Amazon, they lost their jobs and they had to do something else.”, as Jan ironically phrased it when talking about the drop in the number of live streams during the second wave. Andre had similar concerns about the hardships of the subculturists:

I have some links to music magazines in Czech, but it is not that I check them regularly. So it's been more like articles especially in the last 15 months about the smaller club or music bar scene and how they manage or not with the government help or how much the government at all cares about artists having suddenly no income or maybe sometimes not even allowed to work anymore, because that is basically the outcome of some of the laws they had or have. (personal communication, June 1, 2021).

They both supported some of the clubs and bars they like and found out are in need. Asking for help became a common practice, venues utilized different strategies: announced future events with no fixed date, where people purchasing the ticket paid a little bit more than they would but got a voucher for drinks. Others sold merch, special alcohol, or LPs online. Joined NIC2020, a festival organised by Prague City Councilor Hana Třeštíková and ticket portal GoOut, who „have created a nationwide project to support theaters, concert halls, clubs, and artists closed due to the coronavirus outbreak” (*Prague Launches Nothing Festival 2020 in Support of Struggling Culture Venues*, 2020) which meant selling tickets for non-existent shows to help the cultural sphere above water. Or often simply and directly asked fans for

support, posting links leading to patreon.com, „a crowdfunding platform that enables fans (or patrons) to pay and support artists for their work.” (Sraders, 2019).

The pandemic showed the cultural sphere’s financial fragility. Hopefully, governments realised the importance of the sector and will restructure their finances to build a more secure and viable economy. On the other hand, being hard for virtually every member of the scene, the spread of the virus united them, us, and strengthened the community via mutual support: events organised to keep the souls „fed” – bank transfers to help the music world to do so.

Brief history of electronic dance music (EDM) culture

In this section, I provide a short outline of how electronic dance music and the scene around it. The name already tells us where to look for its roots: in technology. But the time and place of its genesis are harder to pin down. There are multiple myths, several genres have developed in parallel, but fortunately, the situation is not hopeless; the history of EDM can be traced along with four main foci. These are two major North American cities, Detroit and Chicago, and two European countries, Germany and The UK (Bóta & Fülöp, 2000, p. 41). Bennett (2001, p. 120-121) argues that technology has had a major influence on the evolution of EDM. People without academic training in music could pick up any noise from man, nature, the built environment, or a fragment of an existing musical track and then manipulate them (Manuel 1993, p. 29). Music-making became more democratic, as it no longer took a whole band to produce a track, nor a professionally equipped studio (Katz, 2004; Gunkel, 2008; McLeod, 2015; Barker & Taylor, 2007). We can read in Ferenc Kömlödi that perhaps it is no coincidence that two of America's founding genres, house and techno, are associated with local African-American communities. House was born in the Warehouse club in Chicago (hence the name), where „the crowd was mostly gay and almost entirely black” (Olaveson, 2004, p. 36) and these, very often marginalized people could experience the safety and joy of being surrounded by dancers having the same experiences in the world outside the dancefloor:

As Reynolds explains, house offered a sense of communion and community to those whose sexuality might have alienated them from organized religion: In other house tracks, spiritual redemption and sexual rapture are fused in a kind of eroto-mystic delirium. Jamie Principle's "Baby Wants to Ride" begins with a prayer, then the Voice of God declares that it's time to relate "the Revelation of my Second Coming." But the "coming" is decidedly profane: an encounter with a dominatrix, who strips Principle, makes him beg, then rides him through a porno-copia of sexual positions. (Reynolds, 1999, p. 31, quoted in Olaveson 2004, p. 37)

This was the milieu in which one of the resident DJs, Frankie Knuckles, revived disco music. So did Music Box's DJ, Ron Hardy.

Detroit, the bastion of General Motors and Ford, where production lines were modernised, with computers and robots replacing some of the human labour was the city techno emerged from. The Belleville Three, Juan Atkins, Kevin Saunderson and Derrick May were traditionally considered its fathers, and their music was influenced by this dichotomy, a

celebration and a curse of technology. The world of „computer madness and pennilessness, artificial intelligence and crumbling skyscrapers” was set to music (1999, p. 210).

The forefathers drew heavily on the European tradition, the avant-garde’s experimental and rule-breaking approach to music, and the work of a German band, Kraftwerk, which was referred to as the first electronic music group and perhaps one of the most influential of the late 20th century. The band was innovative both in their sound and in their orchestration (Bennett, 2001, p. 119). They used instruments of their invention and construction, alongside synthesizers, drum machines and vocoders. It is perhaps due to this cultural embeddedness, that Germany is until today one of the acropoleis of electronic dance music.

Britain has always been open to musical innovation, as well as a hotbed of groups experimenting with industrial sound. One example was Cabaret Voltaire, who chose their name to pay homage to the Dadaist theatre operating in Zürich during the First World War (Kömlödi, 1999, p. 208). It was also in The UK that the (semi-)illegal parties took place, usually in abandoned warehouses, or meadows, spaces that can be best described as „temporary autonomous zones”, since they represent temporary escapes from the everyday, mundane:

EDM productions are often devised not so much to orchestrate the transformation-of-being and status that is the common objective of rites of passage and shamanism, but a superliminal state of being in transit – an experimental field of experience optimized by technicians and event habitués with the aid of an assemblage of sensory technologies. (St John, 2015, p. 278)

This ethos of electronic dance music was its curse and blessing at the same time: labelled as lacking any ideological directive and being fragmented, the scene often was deprived of its status as a subculture. However, by the mid-90s, half of the world was raving. The story has been going on ever since. Today music aficionados can choose from ambient with a slower tempo, ideal for the so-called chill zones (Olaveson, 2004, p. 108) through minimal techno to insanely fast (200 BPM or more) hardcore. In EDM, new subgenres, as Kembrew McLeod (2001) put it:

are invented, quite literally, on a monthly basis. Without lapsing into hyperbole, I can confidently claim that the continuous and rapid introduction of new subgenre names into electronic/dance music communities is equaled by no other type of music [...] To illustrate, a careful scan of electronic/dance-oriented magazines and electronic/dance compilation CDs published or released in 1998 and 1999 yielded a list of more than 300 names.

He goes on and interprets this characteristic as not only the sign of artistic creativity but as gatekeeping (p. 60). All these sub-sub-sub-genres can be remembered and accounted only by the very dedicated, and by participants who follow every subtle move of the scene, those „in the know” (Thornton, 1997, p. 203). On the other hand, this practice makes electronic dance music culture hard to grasp. However, apart from preference in particular sects of music, there are other, unifying factors.

The culture evolving around electronic dance music (EDM), like many other music-related scenes, was from the beginning viewed differently from the outside and the perspective of participants. While moral panic about the drug (ab)use of the attendees followed the parties (Participation, „Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994”, n.d.; *S.226 - 108th Congress (2003-2004)*, 2003), the ravers experience emphasized the religious revelation and self-discovering effects of the substances. (St John, 2015; Olaveson 2004). While being labelled as escapist, hedonist and self-absorbed, and accused of not having any ideology that aims towards changing the world for the better, participants actively engage in the promotion of policies against any kind of exclusion based on age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion, and voice their opinion when basic human rights are violated (Src=<https://Secure.gravatar.com/Avatar/A821b1a54640b2b05a751f7ead68d131?s=20> et al., 2020; — *Transmission For Palestine*, 2021). As Dalton (2020, para. 1) explains:

Unlike other forms of social gathering, rave culture has also been hailed as a movement which attracts and brings together people from different class and ethnic backgrounds as well as people from all genders (Meadan 2001: 60). As a result of this, rave culture can be identified as a practises in which its participants become a ‘communitas’ (Turner 1969: 360). This is because rave culture is a non-hierarchical practices that constitutes the ‘politics of difference’ and so unites people under the common act of dance (Hae 2012: 176).

This view was echoed by James W. Cannon and Alinka E. Greasley (2021) who identified common practices and values among EDM scene members and their effect on one’s well-being.

After this more general outline of the electronic dance music culture, in the following, I write very shortly about the Czech context, which, in my experience, fits into the global frame of an open, fluid and transitory, music and socialization-driven cultural phenomenon.

In the Czech Republic, electronic dance music became popular in the middle of the 90's, promoted at events like Supersonic Garage, festivals such as Hradhouse, Creamfields Cosmic Trip, Summer Session, and places like Apocalypse, Citadel, Veletržní Palace, Industrial Palace, Abaton or Karlovy Lázně (Bažka, 2018). Nowadays a proliferation of clubs and crews can be seen in the capital. Prague is a melting pot of various music: more mainstream/radio-friendly sounds as well as alternative. Trance-adjacent, experimental, industrial, and darker genres are co-existing. During my involvement in the scene, I experienced many collaborations, co-organised events and a friendly and supportive atmosphere. The city being relatively small, different crews know, follow and appreciate each other. Nevertheless, I have only attended events from the more underground side of the spectrum, therefore I do not have empirical knowledge about the mainstream venues and their relation to and with one another.

An interesting feature of the Czech scene were the teknivals (annual free festival) taking place between 1994 and 2006 on different meadows or military bases. „In 1994, legendary sound systems Spiral Tribe and Mutoid Waste Company arrived to Bohemia, settling in the Ladronka squad. They expressed local people the magic of the tekno which subsequently resulted in the first CzechTek”. Being free parties, the finances needed to organise them were gained via illicit activities (selling drugs) and based on donations, thus the help of the members of the scene. The acceptance of personal differences and the tolerance towards substance use and self-expression of any kind (while it was not harmful to the community or any of its members) were very important. Their approach towards leisure was not viewed with understanding eyes by the authorities and the anger peaked in 2005. The occasion, „according to the organizers, was organized on legally leased land. Yet more than 1,000 police patrols arrived to the party with an aim to stop it by any means- using heavy techniques, tear gas and waterworks.” (Bažka, 2018) The clash resulted in multiple injuries and arrests, one person died. It was followed by political debates and also resulted at the end of CzechTek in 2006 when the organising crews decided that this would be the last occasion, arguing that the vibe changed and the behaviour of the people is incompatible with the credo

of the teknival ('CzechTek', 2020). Nevertheless, one can find numerous free tekno events organised even these days.

In the following chapters, I present my findings in the hope to shed light on an important segment of the cultural world of Prague: the electronic dance music scene, through the lenses of a handful of participants. While outlining their practices and values that construct, or re-enforce belonging and feeling of community, I intend to critically examine whether these social formations can be seen as examples of „collective effervescence/communitas”. Given the unprecedented situation of the pandemic, I inquire about COVID-19's impact on the partying practices of the attendees and how it altered their connectedness to the EDM scene. Since my research is partially based on participant observation, the tone of the following pages is more personal and overlaps with one of an insider's.

Findings

Connectedness at the „real parties”

Jan: Party attendee and drug manager. Party-goer. A true party-goer.

N: A true?

J: It is not a... I am not just pretending that I like to go there for another purposes... I am just a true party-goer.

N: What would be those ‘other purposes’?

J: Getting drunk, getting high, doing something what is considered cool or trying to get in touch with women.

N: So what is the true?

J: I am the true.

N: Going for dancing, going for the music?

J: Going for everything, mostly dancing and music. And people. Seeing. And having them around. Physically. Pysically. PHYSICALLY. PYSICALLY.

(Jan, personal communication, June 8, 2021)

In this chapter, I will examine the testimonies of my informants about their partying habits before the COVID-19 pandemic. Added to the content of the interviews, I will include the data from my preliminary research. Since my fieldwork started after the virus hit the world and the scene, I do not have notes from the earlier times. Therefore, here I can only rely on what participants said. Unfortunately, memory bias will be an inevitable ghost of this section, as well as the possibility of reactivity. I will bear this in mind. On the other hand, both the questionnaire and the in-person interviews carry characteristics which prevent faulty data. The survey was anonymous. Consequently, the results are less affected by compliance constraints. Moreover, if trust is built between the researcher and the interviewee, it reduces the chance that they „will make the reply in terms of you and not in terms of the objective thing he is doing” which was the case in my situation (Lindeman, 1924, quoted by Converse, 1987 p. 54, quoted by Gobo, 2008, p. 6).

The party is an occasion which can be compared to other activities yet hard to put into words. „But more than this, I realized that raving is not only a social experience, it is fundamentally *an experience*”, states Tim Olaveson (2004, p. 11) in his PhD thesis. In the

following, I analyze the practices and values of Prague EDM scene members. To do so, I rely on the framework of „connectedness as collective effervescence/communitas” built by Tim Olaveson and I test my findings for the criteria described by him. I will inquire about the presence of the following in my data: (1) electricity, exaltation, enthusiasm (2) embodied, non-rational, emotional (3) communal and collective (4) transgressive, leveling and humanizing (5) temporary, creative, and utopian. These conditions allow participants to feel connected to each other, and to the scene, even only for a limited time.

Meesha, Pavel and Andre all identified as „only regular party-goers”, who, to quote Pavel, „do not have added value to the scene”. Jan defined a stronger connection to the community. He claimed to be „a true party-goer”. His argumentation of what makes somebody an „untrue” attendee was somewhat contradicting his report later in the interview of the activities he usually engages in during a party. His way of describing, however, sketches a recurrent pattern of „hipness” described by Sarah Thornton (1995, p. 100) when she writes about the „disparagement of raving Sharons and ‘Techno Tracys’” who seem to fake their scene membership and are „out of place”, as Olaveson often reflected upon his own fear while doing fieldwork. In the following, I will analyse the activities and principles that make somebody a „regular” while others a „true” party attendee in order to see whether there is a difference in their connectedness to the scene according to the characteristics of collective effervescence/communitas or not.

„Electricity, exaltation, enthusiasm”

Olaveson locates this first trademark of connectedness in the happenings of one’s mind. As he argues (2004, p. 250), collective effervescence was defined in multiple ways by Durkheim, pointed out by multiple authors: „‘moral density’, ‘concentration’, ‘heat,’ ‘sentiments,’ ‘emotion,’ and ‘delirium’ (Jones 1986; Nielsen 1999:208; Ramp 1998)”. Botond Vitos, when researching the Czech psytrance community, built his research around the notion of „dementia” which was a „folk term” (McCurdy, 2005, p. 40) of the participants to describe the altered state of mind they experienced during the parties, being under the influence of LSD and other psychoactive substances, like alcohol or marijuana. Vitos’s respondents reported „experiencing their own death” (2011, p. 181) in extreme cases, which happened to L. as well and was a critical event in his life. He is a friend of Meesha, Pavel and mine, and he was present at two of the parties I attended as a participant observer, and I will elaborate on his testimony within the frame of the fifth criteria: „temporary, creative, and utopian” but I

have found it important to also mention it here as an exceptional example of altered states of consciousness. Nevertheless, more often psytrancers engaged in linguistic plays on words or impressions:

nonsensical idiom is decipherable. However, at this point it fools the listener: ‘carcass harcass’ is in fact the English pronunciation of the Hungarian phrase ‘karcos harcos’ (‘scratchy warrior’), the meaning of which is inevitably hidden for the non-Hungarian speaking audience (or due to the English pronunciation even to some of the Hungarian speaking audience). After this irreversible loss of primary meaning, infinite linguistic associations or free mistranslations of carcass harcass may arise, driven by the nonsensical logic of psychedelic demence. (2010, p. 162).

Similar features of a psytrance party were addressed by Pavel during the first interview, albeit highlighting the pitfalls of such encounters:

The appeal perhaps lies in the inaccessibility of the majority of the music, rhythm-wise or concept-wise. The parties of such nature are often idiosyncratic in nature of the participants’ interaction, which can be even dangerous.

N: Dangerous? Why?

P: Because jokes can be easily misunderstood or not understood and that can lead to bad trips. All the people I know who had bad trips, it happened because some idiot was not nice to them. Yet, the experience itself leaves the listener with broadened concepts and understanding of the lack of understanding. (personal communication, June 12, 2021)

The „lack of understanding” can be translated to the difficulty to put one’s experience into words, as Geertz explains, quoted by Olaveson: „We all have very much more of the stuff [experience] than we know what to do with, and if we fail to put it into some graspable form . . . the fault must lie in a lack of means, not of substance” (p. 126). These moments of altered states of mind are rooted „deep into unconscious” and based on „self-reflection” (data from my survey, Gere, 2021). Andre framed them as „forgetting time”, „you disappear” and as „new experiences” provided by events organised at atypical locations, for example by Cukr (Prague based crew, organising electronic dance music parties), who

are like: let’s ask those people into a theatre or there was once a party in the Skautský Institut at Staroměstské náměstí which they somehow got, or once was a party in Právnická Fakulta, the Faculty of Law, where probably normally you would not have techno parties seven in the morning on a weekend because it is just... university and the Faculty of Law.”, parties that „get you out from the club you already know (personal communication, June 1, 2021).

I address further in the fifth section of this chapter these practices of appropriations of public places and their transformation into private (Heřmanský, 2020, p. 191), but here is important to repeat that these locales make the exaltation more possible to be felt by participants. However, the feeling is more often achieved via use of illicit and legal drugs, what is a

significant feature of the parties. From the 19 people responding to my survey 16 stated some kind of consumption among their usual activities when they were asked to list a few, one of them showing an impressive knowledge of different drugs: „consuming Club Mate/Matcha/alcohol (rarely)/E/K/2C/MD/LSD/coke/speed/poppers/etc.,/” My interviewees also talked about their or other subculturists’ consuming habits which they connected to hard-to-capture notions like „vibe”, „flow”, „magic and unexpected”, „lost and found”, „searching for enlightenment”. Or to more practical, goal-oriented ones: „mental relaxation”, „leaving personal and professional routine”, „achieving cyclicalilty in life, giving it a rhythm”. Jan’s explanation of why and how he uses drugs gives a synthesis of these approaches:

N: Do you always consume something when you go to a party, alcohol or other drugs, or does it happen that you go sober and stay sober?

J: Every time I am under influence of something.

N: Because it makes it better, makes the experience better?

J: It sometimes makes stuff possible that without it would not be possible. Of course, it happened that I was enjoying sometimes being sober but then everything has to be correct. The music has to be good the people don’t have to be annoying, you feel physically okay, not tired. If it clicks you can enjoy it, I had a very close or completely same experience when I was sober as I would be high or drunk. But drugs help to overcome small issues like if you were tired – you are not tired, you cannot get into the music, something annoys you – you can get into the music. I just enjoy the state when I am high. Different kinds of thinking can be very new, think about stuff from a different point of view. (peronal communication, June 8, 2021).

This latter point was mentioned by Pavel as well, albeit he did not link it directly to substances:

My activities are, however, connected to having cognitive exchanges of highest available quality. I do not pursue the alternative lifestyle for the sake of pure fun and recreation, rather than to expand my viewpoints and help others. This, if I may say so, likely stems from a Christian upbringing. Pursuit of certain abstract qualities has been deeply engraved into my young soul; therefore, I cannot resist behaving as I was taught to. This is resulting in distributing the common good as well as goods, with active participation in the good part. At least I hope so. (personal communication, 12 June 2021)

He also nuances the party experience as not only something collective but individualistic, his testimonies: „Even a typical party is a mixture of experiences. Personally, I have always leaned towards focusing on the music rather than socializing”, „relax socially exhausted mind” and the sophisticated description of house music: „meditative states of progressive house. The dreamlike quality of the non-demanding style has attracted the proclivity to daydream, to feel out the existence, to become blissful in the being.” outline a more inward-looking, self-contained approach, which counterpoints the notions of shared enthusiasm.

Another interesting feature of drug use was revealed in Meesha's narration about different genres (techno and psytrance) and the people connected to those scenes. She utilized drug consumption as a frame to present the „family”-like character of psytrance as opposed to „trashy” techno:

psytrance people are who have more money and now they are looking for some enlightenment and they like electronic music and they kind of have this vibe. [...] everybody is on this like...cloud, probably they do a lot of...some LSD and different things which is kind of this connective thing and the more you go, the more people you know and they kind of a small family

stays in contrast with: „They also form this family but maybe because there is less money there are maybe more fuckups, you can see people laying on the ground being tired or maybe being really high on things” (personal communication May 25, 2021). It is interesting to see how the same practices are connected with opposing values in Meesha's discourse.

In my view since we are talking about individuals bringing their own personalities into the party setting, it is hard and unwise to generalise how one feels during a rave. Albeit the consumption of drugs causing or amplifying altered states of consciousness seems to be a given fact among my informants and the bigger scenes they belong to, their motivations are very diverse, and they are aware of the dangers of drug use too, not only of the positive effects.

„Embodied, non-rational, emotional”

This second characteristic of connectedness involves the body and the emotions the bodily experiences evoke in participants. In the following, I present the practices and values which can be connected to the experience of „emotional, non-rational, embodied”.

The survey data showed dancing to be the second favourite activity of the respondents, 17 of them naming it. My interviewees likewise all included dancing as a central part of the party. However, as opposed to Olaveson's (2004) emphasis on the collective character of dancing, I can unpack a just as important, albeit self-oriented position of the activity as well: Jan, when talking about the course of an average party, distinguished a „dancing phase, 1-2 hours without talking”, while Andre stated that he has „no interaction on the dancefloor”. Furthermore, in the utterances that contextualized dancing as involving other people, it was either an expression of annoyance: „so when it's too crowded or there is too many annoying people, which doesn't let you dance, i don't enjoy it.”, „I like the atmosphere, but mostly

parties in Prague are destroyed by too many tickets sold and too many people on small space.” (survey data, Gere, 2021) or had sexual overtones, which again does not necessarily align with Olaveson’s report on the lack of sex-driven approaching of other party attendees (2004, p. 181). In Pavel’s perception, „dancing can be thought of as a secondary sexual health display mechanism”. Meesha, who given her gender, is more likely to be the victim of some kind of sexual harassment in a party setting (Suhasini, 2020; Mellgren et al, 2018; Brooks, 2011; Hancock, 2017), voiced her dissatisfaction with the Czech scene: „I lived in Denmark and in the UK, so I have some comparison and I think that the party culture in Czech Republic is not always safe, at least I think so.” and she went on describing how she learned to stay alert during raves, because „as a girl/woman, you can experience some nonconsensual touching from male partygoers, they tend to blame this behavior on alcohol often” (personal communication, May 25, 2021).

On the more positive side, party-goers reported „deep feelings”, „joy and happiness”, „fulfillment” connected to dancing as an activity, or that they „felt that my life is going in the wrong direction in a good way” and achieved „mental relaxation through dancing”. For one survey respondent „performativity, body experiment and weird movements” were core to their party practices and identified them as modes of learning. Two other interesting bodily experiences were mentioned in the questionnaire-responses, one is eating, which can be seen as sensual and fulfilling after hours of fierce dancing and as a means of recharging batteries, the other is the lack of fear of infection, which is a memento of how the perception of safety and entering shared places changed with the spread of the virus (respondents were asked to talk about pre-COVID party practices and experiences, Gere, 2021).

While dancing is an indispensable part of the party, it appears that its function is more complex than only uniting a crowd in the movement (Cannon & Greasley, 2021, p. 5). It also includes notions of safety/harassment, enjoyment/annoyance, interaction/isolation.

„Communal and collective”

In this section, I elaborate on the ways my informants experienced the feeling of being united, how and which emotions they felt and shared with the people around them at parties. Since Olaveson highlights the importance of music in evoking „communal and collective”, I too analyse the participants’ utterances concerning music to see whether it plays the same role in their experiences.

My informants reported varying combinations of the importance of music and feelings of community. Only one person who filled the survey mentioned the crowd and music in the same sentence. But the in-person interviews revealed more similar thoughts about the music as the catalyst of the „being one”. Jan, who again distinguished himself from the „untrue” party attendees, said the following:

When only the true party-goers are there, the untrue party-goers left and I feel some connection with most of the people. Usually around 4 am. Frequently happens but I don’t know how. Maybe at the bar just talk about music probably when it is really good, I just say „Hmmmhmmm it is really good, right?” Someone starts talking or I start talking. But I am uncertain how it goes. It happened, but I don’t know exactly how.

Also, he talked about girls and the decision to approach them or not, albeit here the emphasis from being united and the role of music in it shifted to his ego and to the party as a whole: „something I definitely like about parties. I don’t have to talk with the girls. They are just there – there is possibility to something is gonna happen. Possibility and sometimes you can just feel it that there is or could be some connection – and that is enough. It is good for my ego” (personal communication, June 8, 2021).

The more general pattern was to talk about music and community as distinct features being important for different reasons. The feeling of connection was directly linked to people. For Meesha it also involved the „vibe”:

the bartenders and the bouncers they all create some kind of energy and vibe and you can see, especially when you see drunk people and how they treat them or how they treat even smaller issues, and for me, it also creates part of this experience. Of course, it goes again like this: the people and the crowd... who are there... for me, it is nice that everybody understands that what kind of vibe the crowd has.

and then she summed it up: „For me most important is the crowd I share the experience with.” (personal communication, May 25, 2021). Andre meditated about the multiple factors of a successful party which actually involves music, but the emphasis is more on the people around him:

When I am on my own, and I run into interesting people or people that I might know, maybe spend part of the evening with... When I am with folks it could be a bit longer, the usual, not peer-pressure, but the social processes within a group, that you might all stay together a little bit longer. I am not sure what makes a good night. I guess you sometimes manage to align with the music concept or the flow, or if a crowd is good, or the setting, the surrounding...

Later he further highlighted the importance of little gestures, which Olaveson labels as „the nod” (p. 279), that enforce the feeling of community: „those shorter, smaller interactions,

saying hi or exchanging a smile can also be quite fine, yeah.” (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

On the other side of the spectrum, there are the party-goers for whom the music is the priority as opposed to the presence of other people: „I’m not a very typical party attendee in last years. I tend to focus on music quality. I go to party only to listen music I really like.”, those who go to parties because the „quality of the sound”, or as Pavel did, almost set the two features against each other:

I am also having a hard time deciding if the music listening experience is the core reason behind going to parties, as I rarely socialize in an excessive manner. In the end, there are multiple other reasons behind the party appeals, but I would guess that at least in my mind these two are the major ones. Music itself is perhaps connected to the conscious experience of the party; the social appeal is deeply coded into the subconscious. (personal communication, 12 June, 2021)

Moreover, in the excerpt that I quoted in the first section of this chapter, Pavel connected qualities of electronic music genres: „inaccessibility” to danger and possible ruptures in the interaction between participants, thus further undermining its uniting aspect.

The „communal and collective” are phenomena that definitely can be felt by the party attendees, but not necessarily or exclusively related to the music, but rather something simply interpersonal. In addition, the motivation of the participants to (regularly) participate in electronic music related events is multifold, sometimes with a completely individual purposes.

„Transgressive, leveling, humanizing”

Olaveson in the section of his thesis dedicated to „transgressive, leveling, humanizing” criticizes the „postmodern theory’s (and postmodern culture’s) fetish with ‘diversity’ and ‘individuality’ and its allergy to anything even remotely smacking of universality or a biological foundation for human behaviour” (p. 282), and enthusiastically describes „the unbelievable kindness, love, and warmth that the Montreal crowd showed” (p. 284) to his researcher-partner and him, claiming the experience to be the „most forceful argument” in favour of the presence of the fourth criteria of connectedness. He sums up his view quoting one of his informants: „people want to belong to something” (p. 283). In this section of the chapter, I inquire which aspects of the party can be possibly considered to provide participants with the feeling of trespassing borders/norms or better about themselves, more human.

According to my survey data, the number one reason (mentioned 18 times) for respondents to attend parties was socialization: to meet/hang out with their friends and to get to know/observe/enjoy new/interesting/wonderful looking people and their style. One of the survey fillers, referring to the social-distancing measures, wrote: „One of the things that I enjoyed the most (and also took for granted) was the opportunity to meet new people and form new relationships.”

However, their drives to socialize are diverse, just as the extent they engage in these practices. One respondent listed multiple:

I like going there and get drunk with my friend group, also is cool to find so many people that you know by sight, but there you have the choice to really speak and know them. I also like trying to have conversations with cool girls I feel attracted to, with the intention to pick up in the case they are also in the mood. I like to see so many diverse and different people while we all enjoy dancing and hearing techno music. I also use to feel in general a happiness and enjoyment deep feeling inside me while these parties last. (survey data, Gere, 2021)

For some „chatting” is the most important, others want to „have fun”, „laugh all night”, „get into the mood”. For Andre, who works „remotely” and has „no contact otherwise” attending parties turned to be a great solution to „feel social”. Interestingly his approach remained somewhat reserved, as he often preferred to just „see and watch” others without interacting. Jan, who gained the title „drug manager” in the friends’ group, put extra emphasis on the importance of seeing people, as it can be read in the leading quote of this chapter, „Physically. Physically. PHYSICALLY. PHYSICALLY”. He called himself a „drug evangelist” who wants „to help people”. For him having others around seemed to be extremely important, most of his party practices were people-oriented. He claimed parties to „work better than Tinder” for him in interacting with girls. For Meesha the feeling of „family” where „I met people and they gave me food and it is really happening like this” was an encounter that enforced her commitment to the scene. At the same time, the feeling of safety for her was strongly connected not to the random members she may party with, but to her friends:

I even prefer going together actually. Having at least two friends with me and we kind of stick together, dance together, and maybe we are on the same level in alcohol consumption. It is nice to have at least someone who looks after you. This stance was echoed by one of the survey respondents, for whom the „atmosphere, tribal belonging and safety” were the most critical conditions of a good party. (personal communication, may 25, 2021)

While Pavel argued that: ”I do not take any part of the social aspect of the gathering seriously or having added value. This stems from my incompatibility with active participation in the

emotional subgame of evolution.” and that: ”The genres are in my view limiting aspects to the actual experience, but they help to create clusters of like-minded people. Even though this may not always be the best formation of society.”, he still appeared to capitalize on social interactions „to expand viewpoints” and safely „express non-standard chains of thoughts” or get inspired by the dedication of other scene members:

The combination of precise enumerating of played songs along with the subjective perception of the party was an illuminating literary experience. I would like to highlight the fact that I am not an active reader, nor do I have an affinity to written cognition memoirs. That has accelerated my deeper interests in the art because glimpses of yet unattained thought patterns started to emerge from the memories and eyes of others. (persoanl communication, June 12, 2021)

Social ties were not only central in the party experience but often prior to that: they served as sources of information about the parties: when asked „how did they know about the events”, out of the total number of 19 fillers, 18 people answered „from friends”. These practices exceeded the offline settings since both Meesha and Andre relied on social media like Facebook to get informed by the next party (Heřmanský, 2020, p. 193), and in the survey the option „social media” got 18 checks as well. To „be in the know” (Thornton, 1997, p. 203) meant for Meesha to have some DJ and organiser friends, or friends who have DJs and organisers as their friends, and who would notify her about the next occasion. Andre followed the organisers directly but also his music lover friends: ”a little bit based on people, like Facebook puts stuff, like showing you that ‘Bla is going to this event’ or so. So that can also sometimes create my interest and then I click on the event and see what is it about.” (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

Another „humanizing and leveling” aspect of the party besides its above elaborated social-belonging-connecting character, was that participants could get „a break from workday” (Andre). Or as one survey respondent elaborated:

But perhaps most importantly for me personally was the cyclical rhythm that attending weekend parties gave to my life, and the capacity this cycle had to refresh my mental state. As someone who spends most of the day working on intellectual, academic, or artistic endeavours which require mental focus (and a sedentary existence), dancing for 8 hours straight and clearing my mind with drugs and interactions with friends allowed for me to better re-integrate with a workflow in the coming week.

A further feature turned to be salient for my informants: the freedom of self-expression. As the quote from Pavel already showed, voicing atypical thoughts and the feeling of safety to do so is valued by the participants. Having „respectful people” around contributes to the

creation of a safe place: „Carnival. Party is a place to be whatever. Love respect unity. Who knows, knows.” (survey data, Gere, 2021) As quoted in Dalton (2020, para. 1):

In the academic world, strong comparison has been drawn between rave culture and Bakhtin’s notion of ‘carnival’ (Gündüz 2003: 2; Gauthier 2004: 399). Bakhtin described carnival as being a celebration of the ‘temporary liberation from...the established order’ (1984: 10). It is a collective event and a time in which a community deviates from its cultural norms and inverts its social hierarchies (Stallybrass and White 1997: 294).

Since Judith Butler demonstrated that gender is not inherent but learned and performed (1988), much was written and debated about the topic. In my experience, Prague electronic music crews and venues openly take their stances, e.g. Ankali, one of the most famous techno clubs of today’s scene:

Just treat others with respect regardless of origin, age, gender, sexual orientation and religion. Violent, homophobic, sexist behaviour or any other kind of harassment or discrimination will lead to the end of your night at Ankali. And if you happen to witness such manners, please contact any member of our staff right away. (*House Rules*, n.d.)

Attitudes like this and also the frequent „no photo policy” encourage party-goers to display non-binary gender identities, just as to dress up in any weird and alter-from-normal style, until it is not offensive for others. As Andre told me:

I guess I do like more the rougher or more interesting characters in nightlife, cuz’ I also believe that people at night are more likely themselves or what they want to be or how they want to see themselves than necessarily in daytime... Especially you see more characters, let’s say, at things which are less mainstream. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

„Transgressive, leveling, humanizing” all could be identified in the regular practices and valued features of the party in the narrative of my informants. Everybody had some relatable experience of belonging, formation, performance and violation of socially accepted norms. Being, possibly, the least ambiguous, this fourth criterion of connectedness was the easiest to unfold.

„Temporary, creative, and utopian”

In the final part of this chapter, I address those cultural practices and values which may evoke the „experience of connectedness” by being „temporary and transient in nature, and it would have to catalyze creative and utopian cultural products and visions.” as Olaveson puts it (p. 286). EDM scenes were always considered to be somehow transitory in their nature. As places and spaces alike, probably the phenomenon of TAZ (temporary autonomous zone)

describes them the best. As I cited in the first section of this chapter (Heřmanský, 2020, p. 191), public place appropriation practices of the scene can be understood as attempts to creating something extraordinary and one-time environment, which feels private for the community. Later in this section, I quote Andre. He expressed his fascination about the Cukr crew, who built their identity as a group of party organisers on the principles of „temporary, creative, and utopian” among others. Furthermore, the proliferation and rapid change of the „hipness” of subgenres (Thornton, 1995, McLeod, 2001), the ad-hoc and often unofficial location of the parties, the use of various substances for enhancing inner journeys (St John, 2017, p. 279), the openness towards non-normative body performances and representations, the character of the music with its melody built from myriads of sequences sampled from various musical and other sources (Gilbert&Pearson, 1999, p. 116; McLeod, 2015; p. 599; St John, 2017, p. 280) are similarly good reasons why electronic dance music culture is hard to grasp in terms of place and time.

These ruptures out of the mundane are present in the data from my informant as well. As I promised in the first section, now I further elaborate on the psychedelic experience of L., because I believe it is a valid example of how events within the party setting can lead to actions aiming to change the world, even if on a small scale.

I started tripping quickly, and all the expected effects came at once. The distorted visuals, enhanced hearing, increased mental capacity. Suddenly I started feeling my consciousness expanding to surrounding nature, but it felt very artificial. I noticed that the birds were singing loudly and focused my attention to their voice. Suddenly their singing was translated into emojis full of love flying around me, I got dizzy, hot overwhelmed and started dancing to their music. In front of me, two portals have formed, one full of nature and green colours, the other stuffed with UV neons and all colours of the rainbow. I was trying to understand what it means and realized that if I choose nature, I will have decided to use my energy to work for nature and sustainability. On the other hand, if I choose the colourful virtual one, I can keep searching in infinity for another story of my life. I looked into the green portal and felt warmth around the core of my being and heart, and took it as a signal that it's what my inner being wants. I decided I want to work for nature and enter the green portal. What happened next is a construct built from my vague memories and stories from the other friends. They - saw me jumping down the hill and rolling in barrels. I - remember the portal sucking me in, rolling the whole world into a sphere and all my memories were flashing through my mind at once. I felt extreme joy being replaced by sadness and pain ... and a flash of joy and love again, slowly and inevitably fading into darkness. I was trying to comprehend this alternating phase and realized I am experiencing death and rebirth, cleaning my Self of any social and human constructs. I felt very calm and full of energy. I felt I saw the source of life and myself in pure form. I heard voices and saw someone helping me, taking me somewhere. Then lying down and falling asleep. When I woke up, I found myself next to a stranger in a yurt, who told me I'm in the festival PsyCare and that my friends brought me there. I sat up, realized I have dirt in my eyes, so I thanked the stranger and went to wash my face. In the mirror, I saw I had a bruise on my head and then found another few on my legs. I

went to find my friends and had a tea with them. I have been building upon this experience ever since, decided to quit my corporate job to help nature, started working in an environmental NGO, then in a green startup and recently co-founded a business association focused on sustainability. It took me more than a year to fully remember what happened and get a good sense of it for my life, I'm happy I didn't die and happy it happened. (personal communication, April 11, 2021)

The liminality of this utterance is apparent. The experience of death and rebirth, the choice between nature and technology, connectedness with the former are themes easy to find in the literature about the genre just as much as in the testimonies of psytrancers. The desire for change was present in one of the survey respondents' answer as well. They wrote about the party: „Out of the city's 'illness'. Air pollution, social noise, visual irritation, normality of heavy drugs like alcohol and cigarettes, consuming... Cities are unbalanced places. Party fairies are using party as a transcendental black hole for crossing all borders of the illness of cities”, later expressing their belief in the educational character of the event.

The contrast between the music - produced and played with relying on technology-, and the „being one with nature” narrative may be puzzling at the first sight, and not surprisingly often led to critique of the scene of just talking about, but not actively doing for change (Vitos, 2010, p. 171). On the other hand, assuming that the world only can be saved if the inventions of modern life are eliminated is a simplistic view and last but not least, doing so is impossible. The balance between the approaches and the use of technologies to protect and not exploit the planet, in my opinion, represent a more nuanced and actually liveable path.

Yet it is important to note, that the emphasis should be put on the „doing” as opposed to talking. In Meesha's discourse, mystification of the experience leads to no real results, change requires agency and effort, and she did not believe in enlightenment either. Meesha positioned herself as a consumer who consciously goes for the fun and nothing more sublime than that:

And also what I don't like it when people make it a religion or something. And I don't even believe it shows you something special. I don't like to make it to this super special thing. It is not. It can show you this world from a different kind of point of view but it doesn't help anything and it is not gonna show you anything that is not already in you. LSD has this super nice feeling of connectivity with nature and everybody and everything. But when you wake up from it, most of the people just go back to their everyday life which is kind of like assholeish and selfish. I mean how can it make you really better? I don't know. I don't like how this became this myth and a lot of people are exaggerating. A lot of people like to feel special. To play this game that I am better than you because I have this and that experience, and I also don't believe in this. I like it for myself because for me it is like going on holidays. This basic it is. I turn off this real world and turn off the bad part of it and everything is beautiful. This is it. It can give you

ideas of what to do next but then it has to be you in the real world going and doing it. And that is where most of the people stop. There were people already in the '60s who said that if you would give everybody LSD then you are gonna save the world. You not. It is not like this, it is not gonna work. It is hard work! With LSD you can lay on the ground for 10 hours and have fun but then changing the world it's not fun. Even this 'being woke' is not fun because then you really realise how everything is fucked up! It is not like „Now I understand the world and everything is perfect”, no. Everything is fucked up and I hate everyone. So the people who really do this mystification, kind of religion and make themselves special about how they discovered, I am just: NO. (personal communication, June 15, 2021)

By different means, but for Andre, the temporality, uniqueness of the moment that takes you out from the settings known to boredom is precious too, and gives him inspiration in his everyday life:

Or I think the yearly Cukr party for example in Barrandovské terasy, the old swimming pool area. When they put a lot of love and effort into setting that up, days before already, planning it, to still have a good sound, sometimes even outside, the lights, the spirits, when, where do you put the smog thingy... how is it called, fog, fog I should say, these kind of things I guess, like... those are special events and nowadays I also understand why the entry fee could be 500 or sometimes even 600 crowns, which initially felt a bit expensive, but then realising 'okey, you really put a lot of thought and plans in this and it probably took you days to set up and weeks to plan it'. I usually appreciate that because that gets you out of normal clubs that you might already know. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

He is talking about another issue, the price of the tickets. The narrative of inclusivity can be debated, yet one has to take into account that the maintenance of venues, the salaries of the staff, the honorarium of the artists all cost money. In an economy of art, where making a living from music production and revenues from streaming platforms disproportionately favours the already established artists:

This phenomenon leads to increasing disparities among musicians, since music companies are mainly focusing on the signs of visibility, thus preferring the “bigger” or “promising” artists instead of the “more obscure” musicians. As a result, we can point out a general injunction among musicians to “be online,” to have a serious online presence and have their music available to their potential fans, but also professionals (labels, venues, and booking agents). – (Tófalvy & Barna, 2020, p. 50),

is at best challenging (Vejvoda et al., 2021). Therefore examining ideology in practice is shaky ground. Yet from these utterances, it became visible that there is some underlying ethos of the party scene which is aiming towards breaking the usual perception of time and space, inspire participants to implement their experiences into their daily lives. Albeit not always explicitly articulated, the inclusivity, a safer environment, a healthier city, or simply the desire to refresh their mind after a week of working, is a drive of the participants' practices as well as it shapes their values concerning the scene.

Under lockdown – the scene online

The live stream starts at 20:00. It is 19:30. I have conflicting feelings. I know it cannot be „real”, in the sense as it was before the curfew. I am afraid it will be lame and awkward and will feel forced. But I want to push it through because I miss dancing and I am disappointed that it never happens. I start preparing myself. I always find great pleasure in choosing my outfits for parties. When I go out I display my „alterego” - Genovéa Gold. She is wilder, showing more flesh and maybe wearing more black, animal patterns and glitter. I decide on a black mesh shirt with roses embroidered on it, black velvet leggings and a sleeveless windcheater also with a rose pattern. I put on red lipstick and mascara. Seeing my dedicated preparation, Pavel makes a move too: he puts on socks from his collection for social occasions, which means not the usual black ones. These have little colourful aliens on them.

Our home is divided into two rooms: a living room with a kitchen corner and a bedroom. There is not much space for dancing because in the living room there is a coffee table, a big couch and my study corner: a table with a Pilates ball and two chairs, while in the bedroom a double size bed and Pavel's office corner: a table with his laptop and additional monitor, a huge Pilates ball and a chair.

I got from a friend a disco bulb, which you can put instead of normal ones. It rotates and sheds different coloured light.

Nóra: Pity that we cannot change the bulb in the sleeping room. Then we could have it as the dancefloor because the music is here... Then the living room as the chill zone, the kitchen as the bar, we could even have a smoking area on the balcony.

Pavel: In theory, we could take the laptop to the living room, but the screen has better speakers... I should have gotten those speakers.

N: Nevermind, maybe if we leave the door open we can see something from those lights.

The stream starts and first we sit in front of the screen and watch it. NCOL is playing.

N: Do you know her as well?

P: I follow her, but I am not sure if she knows who I am. We met briefly.

N: And Claudia?

P: No.

N: Let's go to the bar, I want a drink.

We go to the kitchen and I prepare myself a gin tonic, for him a big shot of gin.

N: Ice?

P: Yes, please.

The party lights are on and I feel like dancing. But at the same time, it makes me sad that it is only two of us, in an apartment. Feels like two kids playing adult. To overcome the blue, I show Pavel a meme I recently found: a photo of an elephant, barely covered with some black pencil lines. The caption says: „If anyone can guess this animal I will drink tonight”.

P: Hahaha, can you please send it to me?

N: Sure! Let's take fotky while we are presentable.

P: I am not planning to drink too much, I still have to work.

N: But I told you about this already. I was looking forward to it so much...

P: I will party and have fun, but I never planned to get shitfaced.

N: Ok.

P: Photos?

N: Oke, let's do them.

Pavel puts his phone on the stove, secured with a cup from falling. It is set on timer. We cluster ourselves below the colourful lights and strike crazy poses as if we were celebrities partying hard in a posh club. We take three photos, and then start to share our joy with friends, or at least to share the joy we are trying to bring into existence. We are sending the elephant and us to the group chat with Meesha, L. and V. They are eager to help us and happily guess the animal on the photo, not like Andre or my friends from home, whose answers range from zebra to dinosaur.

N: Look, that little fucker! – I say while showing Pavel Andre's message. – But no problem, we are really supportive towards people with bad eyesight or lack of biology education.

We spend 10-15 minutes telling people how hard we party. But the actual party haven't started yet. We move back to the 'dancefloor' and sip on our drinks. I am a bit hungry, so I go back to the kitchen and bring some nuts and dark chocolate pieces. I arrange them on the table, in front of the screen, in lines. When Pavel notices what I am working on, he burst out laughing. Another photo session starts. We capture the glasses and the lines and the screen with NCOL bending above the decks. Pavel hugs me and says:

P: We are so straight edge. Straight jež.

N: Hahaha, well jež.

We bomb our friends with these new photos as well, giggling.

N: But I think if you really need to work, then work now, and then we can enjoy Marie Pravda to the fullest.

P: Okay, makes sense.

N: Sure, I really waited for this party so much, and we were not dancing on my birthday, and I want to finally move my body a bit. And if you will be nervous about work, it will just hold us both back. I will read meanwhile.

Pavel starts to work, the stream is in the background, but the volume is less loud. I move to the 'bar' and open my laptop. I finished my gin tonic, so I made myself another one. I read Masaryk's Humanistic Ideas. My mind wonders and I keep thinking about the awkwardness of a home party. In a club, I would not be reading and Pavel wouldn't be working between two DJ sets. Finally, he is ready. I already finished my second drink hence we pour another one, now for Pavel as well. Claudia is playing, but her time slot is soon over. First, we sit in front of the computer, but then I decide to break the curse and I start dancing. I close my eyes and I am smiling, it feels just right. For a short time, I can forget about the fact that we are home, the lights are in another room and the sound system is poor. When I open my eyes I see Pavel dancing too. I go closer and we dance together. Marie Pravda starts her set.

N: Finally, a Marie Pravda party. I wish the Lidi could be here. I doubt any of them would be watching it, even though I posted in the group. I asked if they are up to a call. But no reply.

P: I am sure you can party together soon, no worries. L. replied to the fotky, have you seen?

N: No, show me!

L. sent us a photo of their TV screen, showing a computer game. Also, they replied to the chocolate lines with a photo of their dark chocolate pieces.

We continue dancing and having another round of gin. Marie Pravda is playing for 25 minutes when the music suddenly stops.

N: What the hell? Look! – I point at the display. The stream has been stopped by Youtube, because of violation of the copyright laws, the text on the screen says.

P: Lol, Marie... Hahaha, being illegal online too.

N: Hah, this is so wtf moment. Now we sit in silence and wait? Imagine this in a club. Some random guys in a suit would come and stop the music. Or actually, you barely could have a single party. Most of the tracks are from other producers. So absurd.

Meanwhile, another link is posted on the Facebook page of the event, Pavel clicks on it and the music continues.

P: We have the Matuška beer. What about having a glass?

N: Sure, it is for special occasions, you said, right? This is definitely an occasion. We can always order new if somebody comes over and you want to impress them.

P: It is not about impressing...

N: Okay-okay, I know.

We bring the beer and pour it in plastic cups from Cross Club.

N: Heh, now we are really in a club. We should pay a deposit to each other for the cup.

The stream ended, Marie finished it back-to-back with Claudia. We are still in a festive mood, finally, we can feel the urge to dance or just to stay awake and talk, anything just to do something.

N: This was nice, but I need something more bumm-bumm-bumm. Are you ok with that?

P: Aha, let's do that.

N: Oki, there is this girl, I don't remember her name perfectly, Masha, I guess, or something like that. I partied with Andre to her music in Bike Jesus. Hmmm, how to find her... It was a Whiskas party. Let me investigate a bit.

I sit at the computer and type the words 'Whiskas Bike Jesus' in the Facebook search. I find the event almost immediately, I just need to scroll down a bit (<https://www.facebook.com/events/538476670370773>). Then I go to the description, where I find the name Mashapes among the artists, whom I suspect to be identical to the DJ I have in mind.

N: I guess she even played in Virtual Healing. Let me check.

Yes, she did, we find her set uploaded to Facebook. We start to listen to it.

N: It is not fast enough. I remember at Bike Jesus she played Fireworks from Katy Perry, you know, so basic pop song, but she made it really bumm-bumm-bumm, we were jumping around like crazy, really. I need that kind of music now.

I type her name in the Soundcloud search engine, and we choose „i wanted to play this at an illegal party, but police came”.

Usually, I wear a specific bra for the parties because of the better support. I am enjoying the music and dancing so much that I have to change this basic one I am wearing to a sports bra. I cannot stop moving my body while I dig for the garment. Pavel is not much into hardcore, so he sits down and just watches my happiness. When the set ends I go and hug him.

(fieldnotes from March 13, 2021)

In this chapter, I present the cultural practices the participants engaged in online through the period of COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I intend to unpack which scene related values can be found as driving forces of these activities. More specifically, I analyse the in-person interviews and the answers for the open-ended questions of my survey inquiring


about the online/virtual events the people participated in. I triangulate this information with the data from my fieldwork and netnographic research: the occasion quoted in the vignette above, as well as content analysis of the „comment section” of the Virtual Healing and Unite streaming sessions, and also the comments below some other Facebook entries posted by clubs and venues my informants follow: Ankali, Fuchs2, Cukr and Komiks (Kozinets, 2010; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1997). I want to see how participants adapted to the changed situation and how they benefited from the online possibilities. I am interested in the extent and the modes of how „connectedness” was maintained by the party attendees and whether Olaveson’s five criteria can be fulfilled.


Virtual Healing and Unite were two „umbrella” events: they united multiple electronic dance music crews and venues and shared their live streams on their page, registered for this purpose on Facebook. Virtual Healing initially was planned to run between the 21st of March and the 4th of April but was extended until 21th of April (the event was called Virtual Healing2 then, but now all the streams can be found only below the name Virtual Healing) and was a project of 38 collectives, who had a clear vision of the event’s mission:


Virtual Healing is an emergency platform of musicians, DJs, producers and organizers created to maintain a part of performance culture in Prague through live streaming and to help us all overcome these difficult times. It is an initiative of collectives emerging from the local arts and culture scene who will showcase what they have to offer outside their natural habitats. As a temporary cure to the struggles imposed by the virus pandemic and social distancing, the platform will offer online streams including live music and visual performances, DJ sets, talks and discussions.

Over the course of the next few weeks (possibly months), dozens of sessions will be streaming live, captured in various spaces and studios across Czechia. Get comfy in your private listening environment and try to maintain minimum levels of human contact – we all want to get this over with as soon as possible but enjoy ourselves at the same time. Follow the event for dates, timetables and more details.” („Virtual Healing | Facebook”).

Unite is a platform that focuses on psytrance and posted a total of 320 clips between the 22nd of April 2020 and the 3rd of June 2021.

 Collaborative platform Unite emerged to convey a message of unity and love to the psychedelic community during pandemic times. Several members of the scene are working daily to curate a program streamed every weekend worldwide.

 We’ll stand united with you again this weekend with more great music and visual arts, to keep you in sync with the psychedelic spirit of unity.

 Get more information by tuning in with www.LetTheMusicUniteUs.com

:: Start Times Around the  ::

London, UK 19h00 // Berlin, Germany 20h00 // Tel Aviv, Israel 21h00 // Mexico City, Mexico 13h00 // São Paulo, Brazil, 16h00 // San Francisco, USA 11h00 // NY, USA 14h00 // Goa, India 00h30 // Tokyo, Japan 04h00 // Melbourne, Australia 06h00

(„Unite | Facebook”)

Both events experienced a drop in their number of followers, Virtual Healing did not even continue through the second lockdown.

After this brief introduction, I continue with the analysis of the data and testify it for the five characteristics of „connectedness” to see whether it provides a useable frame for the online/virtual scene too.

„Electricity, exaltation, enthusiasm”

Marie Pravda’s name was a running joke of the summer of 2020 among the „Lídi of Transforma”. It is a Facebook group chat, for Jan, Ž., J. and me. I named it like this, after we went together to Transforma (multigenre music festival in Tábor) in 2020. The source of the fun was that she played almost every festival and many of the parties in the Czech Republic because most of the foreign artists faced difficulties to travel here, so the local stars got more possibilities to shine. But this in itself was not a reason to laugh, quite the opposite, but the fact that we, even though went to most of the events, never actually caught her playing. When in October the parties „moved back” online again after the short summer break, I noticed that even though I was following many crews and venues on Facebook, fewer events popped up on my feed, a phenomenon reported by my informants as well (Andre, Jan). Therefore when my friend from „Lídi”, Ž. sent me the link of the Facebook event for the stream organised by Diera do sveta, „a cultural centre and a specialised bookshop based in Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia” (‘About’, n.d.), and one of the three performers was Marie Pravda, I was delighted. After a long time I felt excited about something happening. On the other hand, as I wrote down in the fieldnotes, I felt anxious. It was not the „electricity” you feel before going out, it was more reflection on the novelty and awkwardness of the situation. As Andre said about online streams:

there were sometimes sets like, „okay, this is not right now my cup of tea, this is not my mood” and I was also thinking that this might work in a club at a certain time, but not necessarily at 8 in the evening when I am sitting home, staring at a computer screen. Maybe that is what had worked at 4 in the morning with a few more people around me and two more beers or something, in a club though. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

I expected something similar to happen. In the interview, Pavel phrased it like this: „Virtual events are nice, but they have almost no chance in succeeding in enhancing the stamina and endurance of the attendee”. However, during the night we managed to keep it going. We consumed alcohol and re-enacted the process of other substance-intake. It was harder to get into the mood, but in the end, it could culminate in dancing and in tiredness after „exaltation”.

On the other hand, the more often reported feelings by my informants were somewhat negative, focusing on the missing thing, or passive and resigned:

But then in January, February, March, April maybe, this year, I was really craving for party. In this time I watched the Bolier Rooms, it was really intensive, I wanted to dance and I was really angry that I wasn't allowed to dance. And it stopped. Because, you know, humans, we are getting used to anything. (Jan),

„watching streams just made me feeling sad and frustrated, so I stopped” (Meesha), or „I felt more nostalgic” (Pavel). The only excitement „is having somebody playing music and you don't know what the next song is” (Andre). Nevertheless, in the comment section of Virtual Healing and Unite, the atmosphere was more elevated. The most frequent utterances were about the music and they were the most visual among all the comments. Which is a special feature of the online world: in the early research of Internet communication, many argued (Kibédi Varga, 1997; Kéki, 1971; Balázs, 1997; Prensky, 2001) that the main difference between the online and offline interactions would be the missing of facial expressions and intonation that are present face-to-face. „Since body language and verbal tone do not translate in our text messages or e-mails, we've developed alternate ways to convey nuanced meaning.” (*What's the Difference Between Emoji and Emoticons?*, 2016). Emoticons and emojis are the means we can rely on to converge to face-to-face communication as much as possible. Since these icons were invented to replace gestures and sound/intonation, it is implicit that they are used in situations when the party attendees would clap, exult or whistle to express their appreciation of the soundscape. Hearts, most often in red or black but in any colour, dancing people, clapping hands, flames, space rockets, splashing water and bombs were the preferred ones (Figure 1 and 2).

Another practice which generates „electricity, exaltation, enthusiasm” and is valued by the community is the consumption of psychoactive substances. Although my informants reported decreased alcohol (compared to the previous 16, now four people mentioned drinking) and other drugs (one compared to nine) intake, in the online places I analysed it manifested more frequently, in words „jeste, ze tady jste. Světelmej paprsku. Sem

uplnepřisátá.” (I’m glad you’re here. A beam of light. I’m totally hooked.), „Je plane fréro” (I’m high, brother)² or a more hint-like „Where is my water?”, which received a reply – an emoji depicting a glass of beer; and in pictures alike (Figure 3). Nevertheless, selecting a mushroom emoji from a keyboard and actually eating it are not necessary conditions for each other. The importance of these messages was bonding with others - the reason why Pavel and I sent the photo of the walnuts to Meesha, L. and V. Using the possibilities of online platforms (Facebook Messenger), we communicated that the same practices are performed as they would in the offline setting, together. The individuals, each of them participating from their home, blocks or continents apart, utilize the online as the shared dancefloor and try to cooperatively create the „vibe”.

„Embodied, non-rational, emotional”

Dancing. For me the central activity of the party. The one I missed the most. In this part, I write about how my informants reacted to the challenges of online parties concerning their values and practices connected to the experience of the „embodied, non-rational, emotional”. When that imaginary coin is on its edge (online and offline), the bodily experience of dancing can be achieved. Pavel and I jumped around in the bedroom, while on the computer the DJ set of Marie Pravda was running, who played in an offline/physical venue, Punctum-Krásovka, „a community project residing in Prague’s Žižkov district” (*Home | Punctum - Krásovka*, n.d.), streets away from our apartment, within the frames of an online event organised by another offline/physical venue from Slovakia. It was a beautiful example of how fluid the boundary between „translocal” and „online” scenes is. Bennett and Peterson define translocal as interaction: „Often the most self-conscious local music scenes that focus on a particular kind of music are in regular contact with similar local scenes in distant places. They interact with each other through the exchange of recordings, bands, fans, and fanzines. (2004, p. 8). In this case, the „exchange” was mediated online, proving Tófalvy (2008) right about the interwoven and intertwined places of scenes.

The online cannot provide the tactility or smell, body proximity of an offline locale. Missing the „physical” was the main argument of the informants for why they did not like online streams and why they did not dance, even though that was a practice previously claimed by almost each of them as focal. Despite the fact that the creators of videos posted at Unite and Virtual Healing did their best to provide at least the visuality of a party using

² Translated by the author.

analogue (e. g. sculptures) and digital techniques alike (Figures 4 and 5), some aspects could not be reproduced: "It is different being in one physical place, not really moving and to stare or watch to what is on that screen compared to walking around in a space, it is completely different when it comes to your senses' experience." (Andre). This remark shows the demand for the sensual. Jan saw the possible solution in the use of VR (virtual reality) goggles and videos adjusted to the technology:

I would like to try it, to have the people around you. I watched VR porn and it was nice, not something you would do every day, but the proximity and the feeling that there is someone close to you... Maybe the people and the smoke and it would be around me, and the music. I think it would be possible... I wonder why they didn't do it more... Probably because there were no parties where they could record it. It is funny... (personal communication, June 8, 2021)

Dancing alone „felt a bit weird" for Andre, Meesha contemplated the possibility to dance in front of the camera in a Zoom (video platform, can be used to organise group calls) party, but in her opinion, it would be difficult to organise, and multiple factors needed to align:

It could maybe work if you have a DJ friend and a group of friends and all of you would connect to this stream and each of you would have a small party at home and you kind of party together. That could maybe work, but again, with strangers... I think you really need to be in one place... Why would you otherwise care for someone who is just a stranger? It kind of feels like stalky or voyeur-ish in a way... looking at strangers' homes.

It is interesting that she mentioned the voyeur aspect of the situation. When we go to a party, we leave our private places for public or at least shared with a community from which we do not necessarily know each member. On the contrary, when we turn on our video cameras in a shared call, we let people see our private sphere. Although it could be a great moment of *communitas* - being vulnerable, seems that not every member of the scene feels comfortable with it, and it is completely understandable, for many reasons (e.g. being shy, ashamed of the environment). Drawing on the testimonies of my informants, one of the rationales was the lack of possibility for disappearance. My interviewees reported that they like the party because you can, paradoxical may it sound, be invisible. It holds great value for them and provided them with the feeling of safety. Nobody really cares about your moves. While, in front of a camera, you are exposed. This means not only that you are fully present for others, but because you reflect on the experience while it is happening, you are fully present for yourself as well (Ahmed, 2014; Muñoz, 2007; Olaveson 2004). Which automatically cancels the possibility to „be one with the crowd". Even so, the comments claiming that one is dancing, or the emoji equivalent of it were frequent. Because the need for the cultural practice

of dancing together is apparent, but attendees leaned towards to choose the „safer” solutions to express it.

„Communal and collective”

On the contrary, when it was a deliberate choice, being exposed evoked the feeling of connectedness. In Olaveson we can read:

Durkheim appears to emphasize this as the most important characteristic of collective effervescence. The mere act of gathering as a group, he stresses, can give rise to intense passions and emotions; it strengthens emotions toward it by “bring[ing] all those who share them into more intimate and more dynamic relationship” (2004, p. 254).

In the current section, I show how the willingness to participate in the scene can create the feeling of belonging. I do so by presenting the various practices party attendees utilized to stay connected, benefiting from the possibilities available online.

The deliberate choice I was talking about was made by the DJs who participated in Virtual Healing and Unite. Their position in the scene is different by default. They are in the centre of attention, responsible for the night (St John, 2017; Bóta & Fülöp, 2000; Gilbert & Pearson, 1999), very often visually „emphasised” and separated from the crowd. When they let party-goers see their environment it had a strong effect of connectedness: they presented themselves as people just like us, equal members of the community. The comments from the party attendees reflecting on the environment, pets and plants showed this: „Libi se mi to rostliny” (I love yout plants), „peseek” (little dooog).³

The mission of both Virtual Healing and Unite was to help people stay united, the scene maintained. Both initiatives were welcomed and followed, albeit with decreasing zeal: VH started with 14000 and ended around 500 views medium, Unite reached 67000 but then the last videos were watched only by 1000 people on average. Other venues and crews utilized online platforms to stay in touch with their crowd as well. Komiks and Cukr (both Prague based EDM party-organisers) posted photos from past events, Fuchs2 (a club in Prague) kept updating their followers about the ongoing renovation of the venue. All these entries recieved mostly likes and other (heart) reactions, and a few comments, recalling sweet memories. Ankali asked people to share their most memorable party experiences connected to the club, and launched an online shop called Emergency store, where participants could purchase handcrafted limited edition Ankali merchandise and thus support the club. The

³ Translated by the author.

reaction to the first initiative was moderate, mostly people writing friends' names (so-called „tagging” them) in the comment section. The shop was on the contrary very successful and was sold out fast. Seemed like members preferred to show their belonging to the scene as opposed to sharing their idiosyncratic actions within it.

The online streams were supposed to reinforce the community. And they did. Their call for interaction was accepted by the people, albeit to different degrees and via various practices. One of them was the above-discussed commenting and liking. However, not everybody was comfortable with public commitment. Andre said:

A: When it comes to friends, I sometimes watched the same stream. For example on Facebook, if it is a live stream, it shows you when so-called friends are in the same stream, but I did not really start conversations in that specific medium.

N: And at other platforms?

A: Yes, that happened once or twice, on Facebook Messenger... But not on the streaming platform... Plus it also felt a bit weird... I mean the term 'friends' on Facebook is not necessarily how you would call these people in your real life, it is more like acquaintances, people you maybe see every other weekend at a party and you have a five minute chat with them or maybe even shorter, but that are not those people you would make an appointment with to meet them one-on-one in the afternoon or something. I think it would have felt weird to contact somebody who is a so-called friend on Facebook while only know[ing them] from parties and say like 'oh hi, you are also here, how are you doing?' especially if your intention is to obviously listen to the music and not entering characters into a keyboard. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

His approach was not without example among the other interviewees, whose communication practices were also more directed towards their close circle of friends. Like Pavel and I, they engaged in conversations on Facebook Messenger while simultaneously participating in the online streams and sometimes dancing, consuming in the offline world. This way the experience was extended from singular to shared, and became closer to one of a „live” occasion's. Another possibility was „making it an event” as Meesha and an anonymous survey respondent did. They watched/listened to the streams with others while being in the same physical place. Despite her effort, for Meesha, it did not turn out well:

I think we planned to watch it with the flatmates. I was the first home and I was preparing it and then they came but we kind of had to quit because the sound was not the best. Because when you know how it is supposed to sound then it is really kind of annoying when it doesn't really sound how it is supposed to sound.

N: So you just turned it off?

M: Yeah, we started watching Netflix I guess.

N: That is so baaad.

M: I know but what are you supposed to do? (personal communication, 25 May, 2021)

The underlying problem here was the inability of the online to fulfil its „claim”, the invitation for an experience that can be as pleasant as the offline would be, similar to what happened to Pavel and me when YouTube cut off Marie Pravda because of copyright violation.

On the other hand, there were more successful ways to capitalize on the possibilities of online: the already mentioned Facebook Messenger, and Facebook groups. Pavel, Meesha and I are members of a „secret” (relative term, see Heřmanský, 2020, p. 192) Facebook group, where „we are sharing DJ sets in this group. The group is named ‘Porno Sety’, the historical meaning of the word ‘Porno’ in this sense was linked to a shared vacation with a group of friends in the year 2010. The word became a buzzword there, meaning ‘of great quality’.” as Pavel described. However, apart from some appreciating comments, there is not much conversation happening in the group, it is more about sharing the joy of a pleasant music discovery. For expressing more personal thoughts, like missing each other, hoping that soon we can meet again offline, sending photos of house parties or planning meetings, informants use Messenger group chats (like the ones I am in with Meesha and Pavel, and with Jan). (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11).

Probably because online communication with friends comes more naturally, while with strangers it does not, my interviewees missed sharing venues offline with people they do not or only superficially know.

Let me put it in three categories: really friends, then acquaintances, people you know but not very well, and strangers. With friends, I have some means of contact, some kind of contact info. Sure with some of them suddenly switching from seeing each other or running into each other anyway because of shared interests in evening events to a written form in some kind of way probably didn’t happen too often but it still felt like sometimes commenting on things on social media a little bit at least... With acquaintances, people I know their names from parties or sometimes talk to them but not being close to the level that you would expect an exchange of contact data or so. That was something I was missing, few faces and I only know their first name and not seeing them from time to time anymore and having a short conversation on how life is or whatever or how the music is or the place if the party was at a special place or something like that, the setup, I was missing that, yeah. And the strangers part I guess especially because you can’t emulate that. (Andre)

and similarly:

Because the thing I really miss is that I go somewhere and there is a lot of people I don’t know and we kind of create this thing together. I need the strangers there. That is the difference between having a nice dinner, can it be take-away, and they bring it to you and going out to a restaurant: the same food, but the feeling is different. It doesn’t matter to me whether I talk to the people or I don’t, I just want to be part of... it is this tribal thing. I

just want to be part of the group. Dance together. Because for me it creates some sort of feeling...

N: Belonging?

M: Yeah, this is like the bus of the event, you create this thing together without knowing it, everybody does their own thing but then it is a party and you do it together, and this is what you can not... Even if I watched them online, streaming, a good DJ playing and I even can watch everybody there...I don't care, I don't care what they are doing in their home, why should they care what I am doing in my home, I just want to be in one big room with them to do our things together and separately. (Meesha)

These quotes show how valuable is for participants to share the event, to experience it together, and how important a role offline places play in the process.

To ensure the possibility to return to them, participants were willing to financially support the venues they like. Andre, Jan, and one of the survey fillers spent money with this intention during the pandemic. Their approaches, however, were different. Andre made a miniature research, „directly asking people” and „Pretty often looking at their [venues] Facebook pages if there is any information, sometimes definitely myself looking up their pages if there is any kind of info on their state and on how they manage financially. And sometimes I also heard that from friends.”. He consciously selected venues to support as opposed to crews, because „they have fix running costs”. The survey respondent bought tickets to online events but never attended. Jan's take, who chose to support various venues that were offering something in favour, was somewhat similar on the issue:

I have to have a feeling that I am supporting them, I am not buying it just because of the stuff. I will enjoy the stuff and I support you. I wouldn't pay for online streams because I would feel that someone is trying to push this kind of, like this will be the future of this field, you won't go to real-life concerts but you would just pay and watch your screen and I find it disgusting.

N: You don't want to support this idea.

J: No, not at all. (personal communication, June 8, 2021)

For all of them, helping the scene represented value, albeit in the narration of the anonymous respondent and Jan a strong dislike towards the online and considering the offline as more precious could be noticed.

The last cultural practice which I noted among my informants that enhanced the feeling of belonging was reading articles, news, blogs connected to the scene. Just like the previous activity, this had different values mobilized. Andre appreciated the Ankali blogs, because „they have really interesting, more like philosophical or anthropowhatever [topics], also sometimes social constructs that are probably a bit more blurry”. For him, it was about getting informed but also learning new ideas. On the other side of the spectrum were Meesha, who

eventually stopped reading scene related news because they made her sad and miss the scene, and Jan, who was angry because he felt that only one narrative was represented.

That is what I hated about them, that they didn't think about the negative consequences. Didn't even mention it. They thought they are helping the situation and they were scared and maybe they realised that what they did wasn't the right thing, but maybe if they said it had been totally against what they said before. And this is the biggest problem. We do this for more than a year. I was against it from the beginning. I would probably survive without rave parties and pubs but everything else should be open, like schools, libraries. But if there is someone who tried to do it, it is really hard to admit that you did it for nothing. (personal communication, June 8, 2021)

„Transgressive, leveling, humanizing”

As Michaelá Pašteková writes:

Routines are originally considered to be the pillars of stability and security. They make us feel homey and in control, even if they can be boring and monotonous. Brushing teeth, dressing or cleaning are tasks that we perform almost automatically every day and in their repetitiveness we find a balance against the unpredictability of reality outside our homes. Usually, the routine is acceptable because it can be disrupted. Breaks are necessary to appreciate the ordinariness. But what if the ruptures are eliminated? What if everyday routine becomes a permanent condition? (2020, p. 14)

In this section, I address the practices the participants performed to achieve „transgressive, leveling, humanizing” states, which enabled them to belong to the scene, and the obstacles they faced while doing so.

The need for ruptures was already discussed in the previous chapter, and when being asked about the online/virtual events they followed, one survey respondent highlighted that „I was not attending, it is not getting me out of my routine”. Pavel and Andre shared similar views on the topic: they often used online streams as background music while focusing on other activities. They both compared it to a „specific form of television” (Pavel),

I see how it maybe could be compared to maybe watching television in a classic way. I never in my life either watched television while not doing something else like reading a book or something. Staring at a screen where there is basically a video running whether that is s television or computer... (Andre).

Jan, albeit hated the situation, felt „a bit more connected to the scene” while watching online streams. For Meesha, the experience was not pleasant either, but revealing:

For me, it really showed that I need people. I really need. Even strangers. I just need to belong somewhere in a bigger group, I could call it a tribal thing, you know. We just need to have this like connection what is not really seen, it is not even really there but it is there. Like this kind of belonging with a bigger group of people... and maybe we belong

together all in a way but we just need to prove it somehow. If we're all sitting at home it is not the same, we cannot show it to each other. (personal communications)

[illegible]

„Temporary, creative, and utopian”

This final section is dedicated to the practices which aim to create a transitory place where magic can happen, ideas about a better world are shared, and to finding out whether it was achieved by my informants.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the party serves as a TAZ, a place that is embedded in the present moment, and where unorthodox practices and viewpoints are welcomed and encouraged, as Pavel put it: „Real parties tend to change a day into an adventure that can be prolonged.”. From the testimonies of the respondents, it felt like they could not find these virtues online: „How can you learn while home, sitting on a sofa?” They compared online streams to „any YouTube video”. The possibility to display a different persona (like me as Genovéva Gold), to boldly show a night-side of your personality was a valuable part of the

⁴ Translated by the author.

pre-COVID-19 party practices, and now it was gone. Andre voiced the importance of that activity too:

I think there is a certain value in watching people, how they behave or dress up for the night, what they want to be, how they want to be seen. Sometimes there are these images that people wanna create and they might be a completely different person at daylight, and that was a bit missing. Watching people dressing up in a certain way for a certain party. (personal communication, June 1, 2021),

while another survey respondent missed „the fun making an outfit”. The magic of being anybody we wanted, „the adventure”, „situations you didn’t expect” constituted value for the attendees, and they felt that the online is lacking it. They said that music by itself makes them bored, or went further and expressed rage against the machine: „sick of fucking technologies”, „I am tired of staring at a screen”. Only one participant talked about the great and novel possibilities of the online: „went to a concert that took place in Japan. which was great. we had a blast stuffing our faces with food at home but it was not the same. then went to a AV party . people do awesome crazy shit in virtual reality and other 3D spaces. i mean real jaw drops or i am just old” (survey data, Gere, 2021).

Seemed like that the online streams’ biggest obstacle in being a hotbed for „temporary, creative, and utopian” experiences was related to time. As Andre articulated:

Plus that is virtual, that is also the case that you could also then maybe watch it a day later if you really wanted it. Compared to a physical event in a physical venue you must be there at that time otherwise you will not experience it, while with the virtual event it is okay. For example, if it is streamed on Twitch TV then you cannot watch it later on, as far as I understand Twitch, because that is really about live streaming, but on most platforms, you could in theory re-watch them. That also takes away a little bit of the feeling of „I need to be there then at that time”.

The party was not anymore a one-of-a-kind event. Thanks to the technologies, now it could be looped like the music that brought it to existence.

Another situation that worth mentioning here is connected to the values of the scene members. Ankali organised an event called „Transmission for Palestine” with the goal to

stream music from all the corners of the world to give visibility to the issue and foster donations to the Palestine Child Relief Fund and the Urgent Humanitarian Aid to Gaza campaign, whose work is to provide medical care to those that have been the most vulnerable to the violence. (— *Transmission For Palestine*, 2021)

Besides comments expressing support and gratitude, the initiative met so fierce anger and disagreement that the Ankali crew decided to dedicate an entire post to clarify their rationale

and position in the debate ((4) *Ankali – Posts* | *Facebook*, 2021). One of the main arguments of the furious members was that a music club shall not take any side in an armed conflict. Clubs are for uniting people, not dividing them based on their political stances. Researchers often argued that the EDM scene is different from the previous subcultures because of its rather apolitical, escapist nature (Kömlödi, 2003; Williams, 2011). This burst of outrage indicates that party attendees like to think of their scene in this way (Figure 12). Interestingly, earlier support for the Black Lives Matter movement did not have the same effect: the related posts received 1-5 ‘laughter’ reactions at most. The reason may have been that in June 2020 the gesture from Ankali’s side could be positioned on a more symbolical-theoretical axis: changing their profile photo to black, writing a blog entry (Franco and Jun 2020, „Second Thoughts”). On the contrary, their call for donation and the fact that they dedicated a two-day-long event to the issue, were very concrete moves, requiring and asking for actual resources. Connected to this aspect, some comments highlighted the fact that plenty other countries or ethnicities may need help too. But the most pronounced disapprovals cited the human/civilian losses of Israel as equally dramatic and disheartening as the Palestinian ones. The debate was fierce, with people expressing their opinion and taking sides through more than one hundred comments.

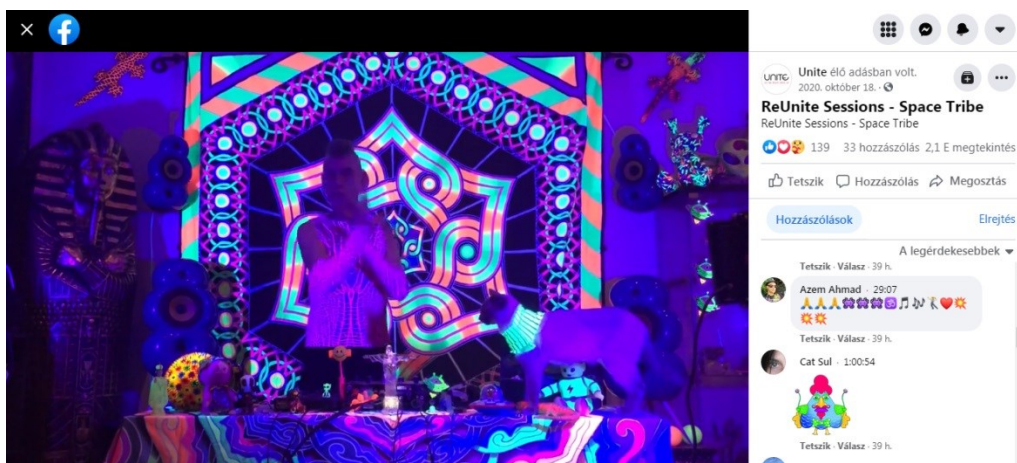


Figure 1

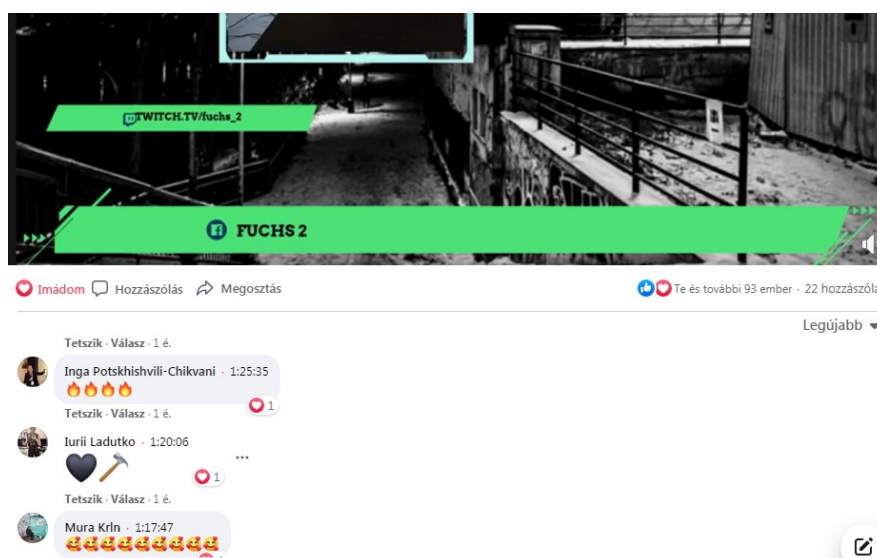


Figure 2

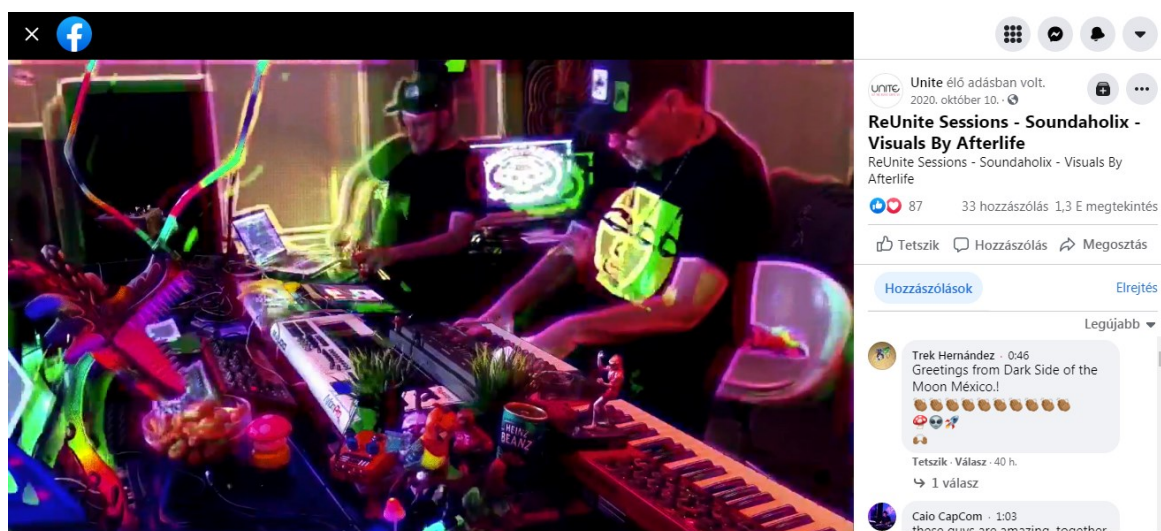


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

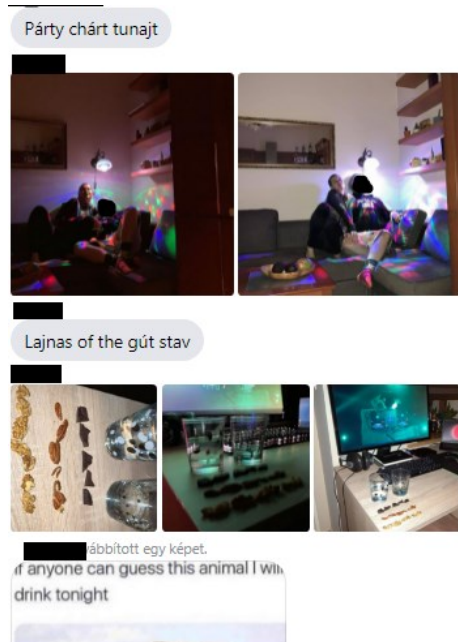


Figure 6

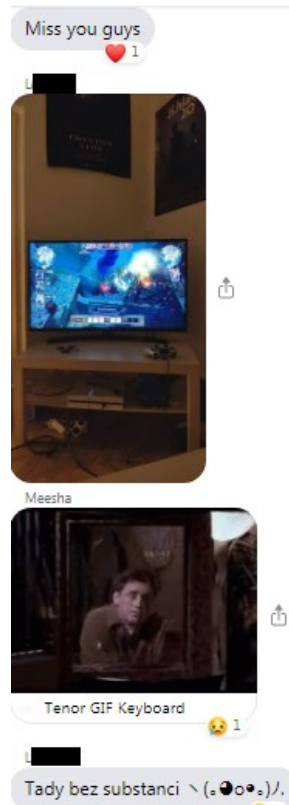


Figure 7

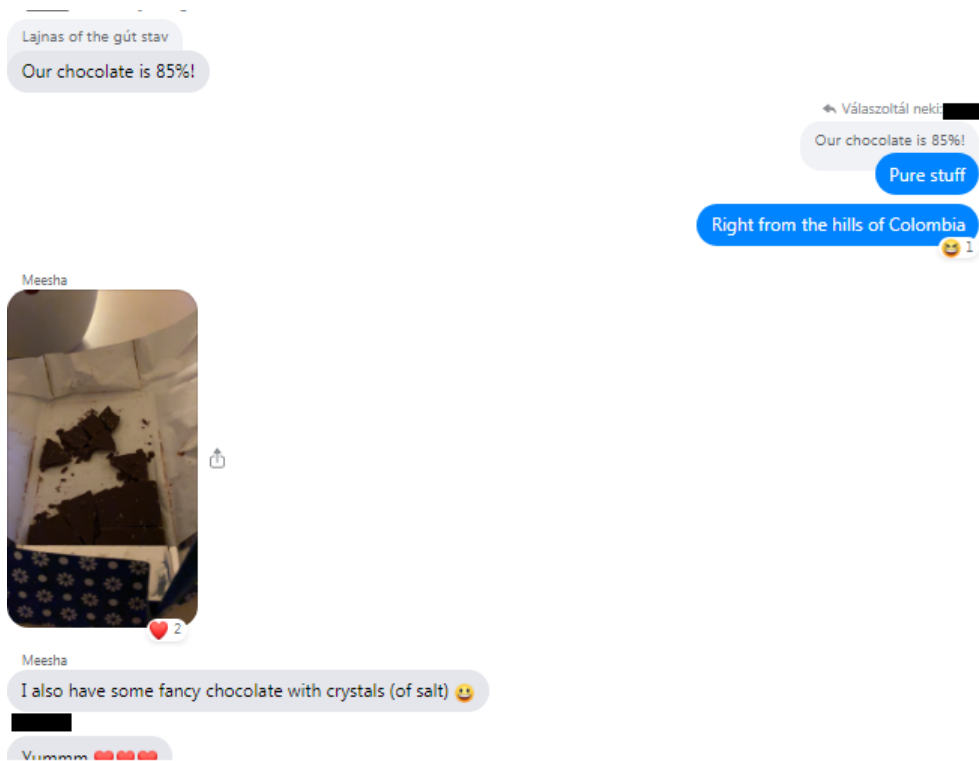


Figure 8

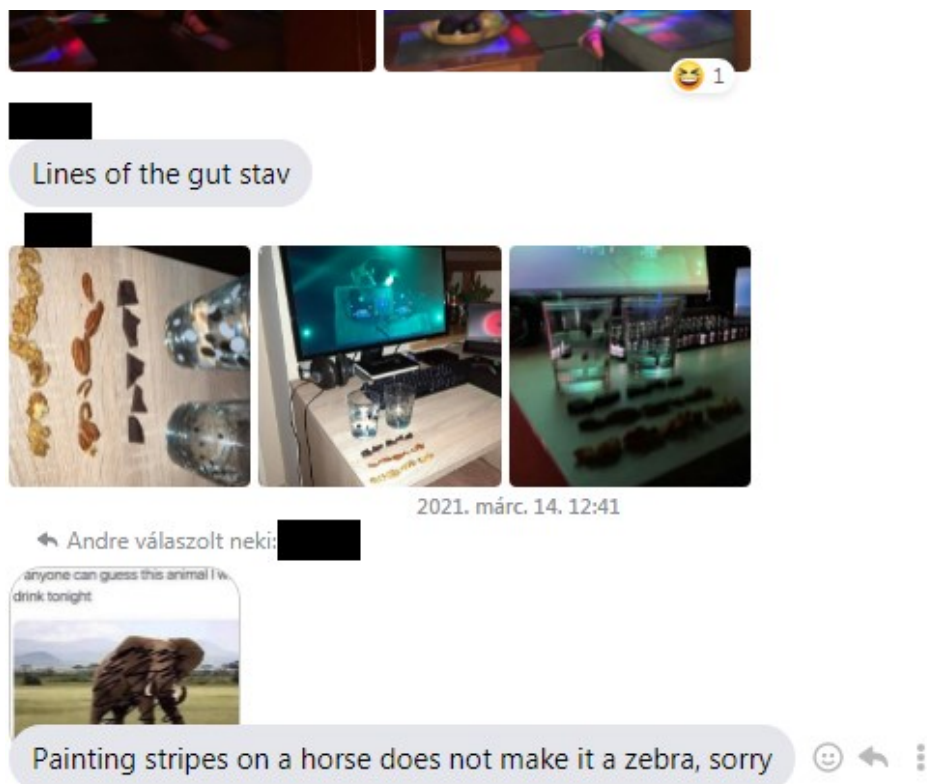


Figure 9

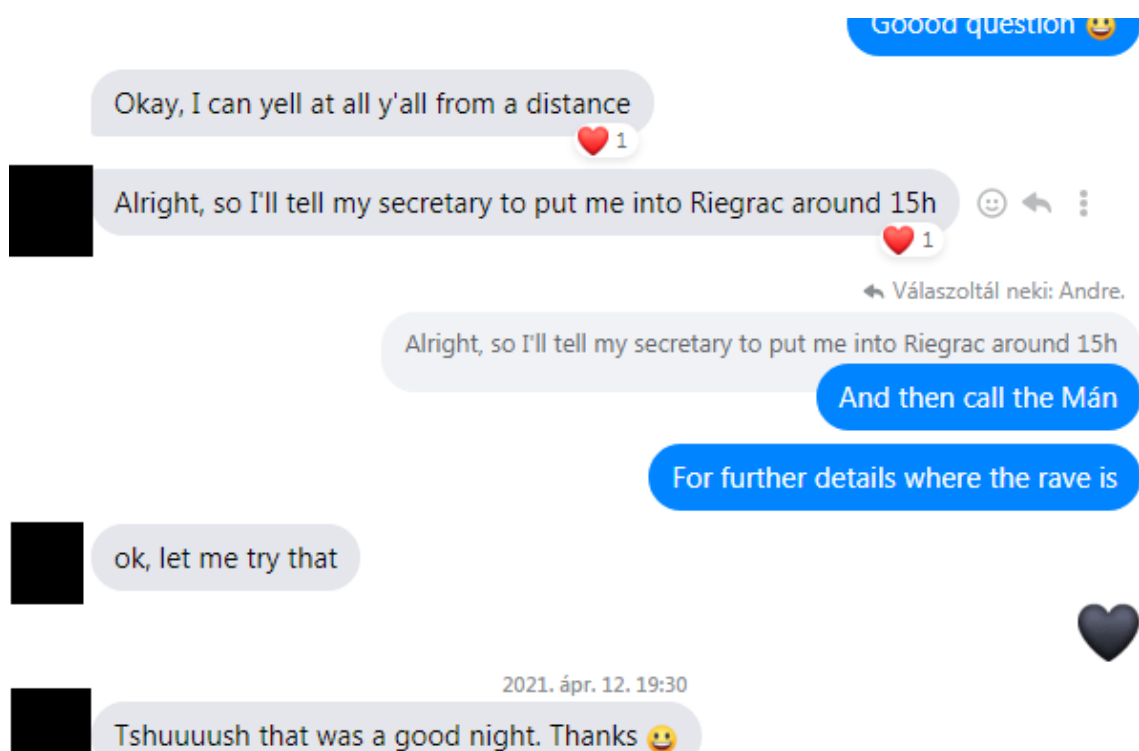


Figure 10



Figure 11

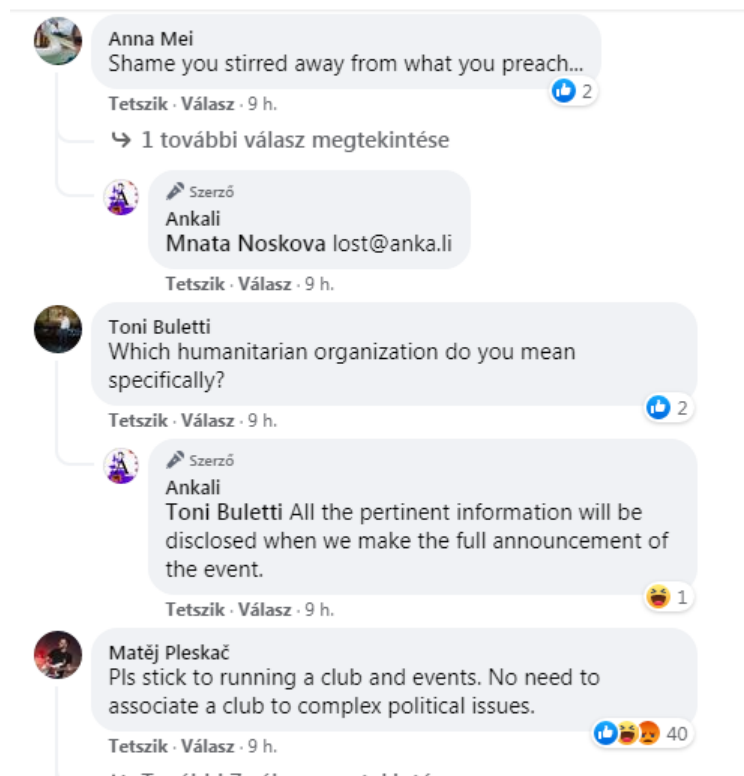


Figure 12

Under lockdown – the „substitute activities”

Only four of us are dancing: Pavel, L., V. and me. M. is at the table, having a line (of cocaine) with W. and discussing Poland's politics. R. is outside, with D. and N., smoking weed. When they come back inside, R. sits down to his spot, D. and N. sit on the couch, looking high, holding hands and smiling. I try to focus on dancing. We jump around for an hour. Then everybody goes to do something else: to drink, to sleep. On the couch now M. is hugging Meesha, they talk in Czech. She looks a bit drunk and sad. Pavel is drinking with W. L. and V. went to sleep, so did D. and N. When M. goes to the bar counter, I sit next to Meesha.

Nóra: Are you okey, baby?

Meesha: I am drunk. And sad. I don't know...

N: It is all okey, hey, we are here with you.

M: I know... But it just feels so, I don't know, so not safe. This whole thing. Feels fake. There is no point in it.

N: Hmmm, for me it is different, you know, I am not into these stuff. But I thought you know them.

M: Not that much. Not everybody. It is just so weird. - She bursts into tears. I hug her. - I don't know, I am sorry. It is just so pointless. Everything is so pointless... But you are cute. And you two are so cute together. He is a weirdo, but when he is with you, he somehow... you two bring the good out of each other.

N: Awww, thank you so much, really. I am so happy you think like this.

M: I mean it. When I think about a relationship I want, I think about you two... But I am just ending up meeting assholes... I am so tired. So so so tired... (she cries and keeps repeating how tired she is) And here... We are so... I don't know half of the people. We are so randomly selected. It is not safe at all... I am sorry I am keeping you occupied with my bullshit.

N: Hey, it is okey. I am happy to listen. I cannot really add something deep, but I am happy you trust me. Thank you. Hmmm, interesting you say it is not safe, and stuff. I really thought it is a group already formed, that you are friends.

M: Not really. Everybody belongs here somehow, but all together... We are not. This is the problem. How am I supposed to feel safe...

N: At least I am not the only one feeling like this. But I wish I was. I mean, for me it does not matter, I came here for Pavel... And of course you and L. and V. But hey, we all love you!

(fieldnotes from December 30, 2021)

In this chapter, I rely on the data from my participant observations and in-person interviews. I present the practices my informants participated in during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain personal and scene related relationships and to belong to the community. Pushed to illegality, parties were not any more viable modes to participate in the scene offline. My interviewees thus needed to adjust to the situation and balance between their and society's interests. They engaged in, as Andre phrased it, „substitute activities”. In the following, I use this emic term to denote house parties in friends' or strangers apartments, in and outside of Prague, hanging out in parks, or illegal raves. By this latter, I refer to parties organised by sound systems, crews or venues, against the official regulations of the government. These substitute occasions were organised around three main activities: talking, listening to music and intake of substances. In the open-air setting, the consumption was limited to alcohol and cigarettes, and the music listening was missing, participants being considerate of their surroundings.

„Electricity, exaltation, enthusiasm”

So far it seems, that reaching altered states of consciousness is highly valued by my informants, and it is more likely to be performed together than alone. As I argued in the previous chapter, while participating in the scene online, respondents reported decreased use of substances, the practice was mostly present in the form of Facebook comments. Not like during the meetups, when it was a central pursuit. In this section, I elaborate on the mode these activities were performed and on what values were connected to them by my informants.

Firstly, the interpretation of these practices by the participants varied. In Pavel's view, they were consumed in „conscious” and „healthy doses” to enhance „additional engagement”, similarly, for Andre „other people” used them to leave behind their possible social anxieties. On the contrary, for Meesha they were both sources of fun: „going on holidays” and stress. She was outraged about the New Years' Eve party we attended together. In the following quote, she is talking about a girls who was new to the group (just like me) and „lied about doing drugs and then was totally lost all the time [...] I really didn't like so many things about that D. N. and W. group because they brought her there and left her alone, and she had no experience with anything and she lied and did a lot of things”. Taking LSD together was one of the main reasons this group of people I got to know through Meesha and Pavel organised parties through the pandemic. The location is outside of Prague, in a Bohemian village,

surrounded by beautiful nature. One of the members, M. owns a wooden lodge there, another, R., the sound system, and they are in charge of who is invited or not to these parties. Because the people present are not necessarily from the same group or invited by the same people, their relationship is somewhere between being friends and acquaintances. This was not apparent for me at first, from Pavel's description I expected a closely bonded group. However, my experience during the research was different, as well as Meesha's testimony revealed that it was not necessarily the case. I will further elaborate on this aspect in the third section, but I found it important to mention it here to contextualize Meesha's distress about the drug consumption of W. In the following, she is talking about the LSD trip

she said she did some before but then after she took it and started seeing things she admitted that she didn't. And N. and D. were just all the time all over each other and they left her alone. And she mainly speaks English and you could see that she is really having difficulties sometimes. For me I know it can be difficult itself, even though I know I can enjoy myself being on LSD, I really like it now. But even me, I have some difficult moments, everybody does [...] And even if you gonna have difficulties you can turn them around but you need to know how. There is a lot of work in it with me, and I DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT SOME W. and also their friends who just left her there. Like nnnooo. (personal communication, June 5, 2021)

She elaborated on how important is to know how drugs work to enjoy them safely, which was not the case here, and ruined her experience. When I interviewed her in May, Meesha was preparing for another party at this location. She said that will be the „goodbye srub”.

Another activity was supposed to evoke exaltation at this party: a music listening session. In my fieldnotes (December 30, 2020) I wrote:

L: Hey, now I would like to have a little bit of a listening session. So please stop talking for 20 minutes, and pay attention.
I feel very weird, I look around if anybody will laugh, but seems that it was a serious request. I don't want to be the one who jeopardizes the event, so I stay silent. Everybody sits down, Pavel and I stay next to the bar counter which separates the room from the kitchen space. The music that we listen to is from Carbon Based Lifeforms. I move a bit, but the tracks selected are really designed for listening. When the music stops, we clap.

In the end, I liked the melodies played, and somehow the occasion gave me the feeling of being in a theatre, an activity I like therefore it turned out to be pleasant. When it ended, others went about their things, there was no discussion about the music. It was a nice intermezzo, 20 minutes of group meditation.

The occasion, when the presence of „electricity, exaltation, enthusiasm” could be felt undoubtedly, was when Pavel and I were hanging out with Meesha, Andre, L. and V. in

Riegrový sady on the 11th of April. Except with Andre, we have not met since New Year's Eve. When we saw each other, we were „smiling like idiots” and „hugging for minutes in one big hug, imitating cat-sounds” (fieldnotes from April 11, 2021). The need for and happiness about physical proximity was expressed by the arrangement of our jackets and blankets. We sit as close to each other as possible.

„Embodied, emotional, non-rational”

In the chapter about offline parties, I outlined what „makes a good night” according to my informants. Here I discuss how successful the occasions I attended during the pandemic in invoking sensual, emotional experiences of connectedness were.

As I mentioned multiple times earlier, dancing is critical for me during parties. Therefore, I was looking forward to it happen every time we gathered indoors. It did in both cases, but it was far from the expected experience. About the house party in our apartment, I wrote:

Andre: Now finally we can show your moose THE song!

Nóra: Yes, let's educate him.

D: Which song?

A: You will see, kitty cat.

N: I love it, it's super crazy. Actually yesterday I went for a walk, and it was playing on the phone, I was smiiiiing.

A: Heh, actually, I listened to it yesterday too, hahaha.

Pavel: Now I am honestly curious.

I step next to the laptop and type „pompompom”. The second video is the one I am looking for. Partially. I do not remember the artist's name, nor the title of the song I want to play, but I know how to find it. I click on „Kyary Pamyu Pamyu - PONPONPON” then on the right I scroll down a bit and click again, this time to the video I initially wanted to show to Pavel: „Kyary Pamyu Pamyu - HARAJUKU IYAHOI”. We smile at each other with Andre, the others are puzzled. Their faces are like question marks: why anybody on Earth would consider this as one of the best songs ever? When the chorus kicks in I cannot resist and start jumping. I make an inviting move toward Andre, but he just smiles and says „No, thanks”. I dance around a bit more, but I start to feel awkward that the song which made me move does not affect the others. I stand next to the kitchen counter and limit my moves to nodding. (fieldnotes from March 27, 2021)

I was a bit more successful on New Year's Eve, then Pavel, V. and L. joined me as well, and we moved for approximately one hour. I sincerely wanted to understand what the problem was. In my view, everything was given: people who love EDM and dancing are finally together, there is enough room and (in the case of NYE) good soundsystem. And it is not happening. Andre, Meesha and Jan gave me very similar explanations. First, they blamed the lack of a proper party setting: „you are missing good lights, you're missing a good sound

system, you might have neighbours, and especially at night they might not appreciate that. And all of these aspects which come with the nightlife: the lights, darkness, smoke, architecture” (Andre). But more importantly, attendees being uncomfortable about being seen was the key. Andre argued:

the amount of people. If you have five people you still feel way more exposed than if you are in a club with 200 people where you don’t feel constantly watched, and I guess there is enough people who still care about if somebody is watching you dancing or not and then feel more comfortable and being themselves basically. It is less anonymity if you are in a room with five other people than with 200 people. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

Meesha shared his views:

Because until now we went dancing outside with some strangers in a sort of different environment, and when you have the friends together in a small flat... some people are really shy so it must be really special for people to actually start dancing, to make it feel safe. Because we are living in this society where everybody is kind of ashamed and like not really ok with their bodies and dancing is also like part of it. A lot of people are really shy and insecure about their dancing. And I think this is also what the club offers. Because you can kind of disappear in the crowd. And maybe joke about it WHILE you are in the crowd, make fun of yourself, but IN the crowd. It is really hard to do it only with your friends in a small group. It is just uncomfortable and I think it also matters how many people are actually in the room who are uncomfortable with their dancing, it is really hard because if you are the only one who feels ok dancing then it is not gonna happen because everybody is like „oh no, I don’t know, is this move ok? yeah, I look stupid, aaah” and then nobody dances. (...) For me, it may really have more to actually how we think of ourselves and our bodies and how much insecure we are. And I don’t think is my thing, it is everybody’s thing, the whole society and the way we grow up...And I think it is somehow harder with friends actually. Because they know you and you just want them to like you. We became also judgemental and everybody is so scared of being judged about the way they are dancing. (personal communication, May 25, 2021)

They both emphasised how valuable is for the attendees to disappear. To elicit the pleasant emotions connected to one’s body through dancing, an environment designed for it and a bigger crowd are required. Being exposed to the gaze of others made people aware of the possibility of being „awkward” and of their bodies. As I wrote in the previous chapter, it is hard to experience the dissolution of the boundaries of the body when we are fully focused on keeping it together.

Jan’s rationale on why it is not happening was short and to the point: „definitely I wouldn’t have the feeling that I wanna dance or something. IT WAS NOT A PARTY, just people talking in a room.”

„Communal and collective”

In this section, I discuss what were and what were not my informants willing to risk to party and to (re)connect with other scene members offline.

They did not attend illegal raves, except Jan. He travelled to Costa Rica with J. (from „Lídi of Transforma”). There they partied, finally, after months. Interestingly, about doing the same in the Czech Republic, Jan had different thoughts: „Maybe if there was something cool, a proper illegal party I would go to, but I didn’t know about anything and I didn’t want to intensively look for it. I had this idea that I want to enjoy it properly when they will happen again, not just some shady stuff.” (personal communication, June 8, 2021)

Andre’s objection was the risk involved:

I myself was unwilling to travel for an hour at night in Prague to get to a place in the outskirts and then party in the woods with maybe 50 people or something. The travel time plus, at least in my personal understanding, it still felt kind of wrong given the situation at that time, numbers were high, infections were high. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

He told me, that he has „acquaintances that still partied every weekend with probably 20 people at home, at somebody’s home, and a good number of them got infected with Covid actually”. Andre preferred to meet outside. To finally persuade him to come and visit us took an effort to Pavel and me. We had to wait until one of his „screw it” moments, which happened „every six or eight weeks”. He argued: „you need to make this balance between rules that make sense to you, that’s not necessarily the government’s rules and still like mentally staying in a state that is kind of sane.” And it was understandable. Social responsibility was a value for many from the community. We did not want to risk other’s, nor our health (Figure 13).

Meesha had several „small listenings” with her friends. They played music from their childhood on YouTube and had snacks. But these people were not from the scene. She put it like this:

that is again what Corona did, actually. You have some friends who are really close to you, and the relationship is a bit different because you share things and you meet more often. But then I have a lot of... I used to have a lot of friends that I would meet at places, you know, and I would know that they are part of this crew that usually goes to this type of venue and sometimes you would meet for a coffee. But that is what Corona actually ended also. That is not only the parties but also the social distancing. For a year I haven’t seen a lot of people that maybe I would see once or twice in a month and have a talk and

get and stay in touch with them on this like ‘not that close friend’ basis, but now we haven’t seen each other because we do not bump into each other at the party and we do not really have a reason to meet or if we wanna meet it is just kind of difficult to organise and also, where do you wanna meet? Everything is closed. (personal communication, May 25, 2021)

It was not self-explanatory to meet with other scene members. Or at least not with everybody. When the categories of friend and peer were distinct, it was unlikely in Meesha’s view to meet. However, when it came to friends within the scene, it was a bit easier. Although not necessarily without conflicts. As I wrote earlier, I will elaborate on the problematic nature of the relationships from New Year’s Eve. As opposed to my expectations, the people gathering there were not friends outside the „srub”,⁵ as they called the parties among each other. Not with everybody. They were a mixture of individuals and groups, selected mainly by M. and R., the masterminds behind the parties. For Meesha, this almost random selection was problematic. She valued safety, as I presented earlier, therefore taking drugs together with people she does not trust caused her hard times. She argued:

For me, one of the nights is actually about that we do LDS together but the meaning is it is supposed to be safe and nice. That is why it should be srub and that is why the music and the sound system is there the visuals. For me, it is one night and the rest is just us being together. But then if you really wanna create something this safe you kind of actually has to end up talking about it with people. And understanding. Everybody has to understand that we do it together. Especially in this small group. So for me... I am slowly... And the more I know some of the people the more I am just like...maybe we are different.

In her perception, the srub became a

race. That is also the attitude the Polish girl came therewith. We slowly realised that she hadn’t even almost tried anything. She doesn’t know the drugs. But she brings a bag full of everything... Like why? This is not impressing me. That was the attitude the people were having there or if that was the vibe it is also very problematic for me. We are all grown-up people. M. is 35 and if by this time you haven’t figured out yourself... (personal communication, June 5, 2021)

She was distressed about the dynamics, as it was visible from the leading quote of this chapter too. As I wrote there, for me it was surprising. On the other hand, I felt a bit of relief, that I was not the only one feeling this way, because I was afraid my personal bias towards excessive consumption influences my perception of the situation. Moreover, I was worried about being excluded from the group because of that.

⁵ Wooden lodge – translated by the author

If not me, but there was one participant who „was excluded from the society”. The reason why it happened was formulated more passionately by Meesha: „there is this group consensus that he is not... He is kind of annoying and he doesn't have any empathy, so it is difficult to be around him when you are on LSD but even in the real life. He is this older man who has his opinion and he is super racist and sexist also.”, and diplomatically by Pavel: „as him having a too far-right/boneheadedly pragmatic views.” (personal communication, June 17, 2021)

To create community, gatekeeping is necessary (Thornton, 1995). Yet as these examples showed, different values can be connected to the same practices by the participants, just as opposing ideology and world view can clash, as it happened here between the more liberal and conservative interpretations of the world. This makes the process of community formation harder. Ironically, since differences are not that apparent in bigger groups, collectivity can be achieved easier.

„Transgressive, leveling and humanizing”

Continuing the theme of the previous section, here I address the activities connected to crossing boundaries, and how different informants interpreted the same practices through lenses of their understanding of values related to the scene.

Andre meditated about the possible differences between age groups and the hardship people may have while adjusting to social distancing measures:

I can imagine that if you are 15-16, in puberty and trying out things, maybe breaking rules, maybe first loves, stuff like that... A lot of opportunities are gone just by the required, sometimes, regulations, that fewer people pass away because of Covid's spread and everything. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

But even for him, who has established life, there were those moments of „screw it”. However, his reasons to attend these occasions, compared to the pre-COVID-19 parties, changed. Instead of „music and watching people” now it was the „social interaction”, „talking to at least some people you don't know which you didn't have a chance usually anymore.” For Pavel, it was somewhat similar. He argued that the „listening and talking party is enough to cover for social needs”, and he framed the New Year's Eve's party as focused on „conversation and listening” and as „more on the sober side”.

Meesha had a different take on this latter opinion. She did not feel safe and told me that she would organise things else how:

Find a place, invite nice people who can dance, give it a different kind of vibe. Maybe more about dancing and music and not all about who does what and how much. In a small group, she went on, it is more important that people have shared values. That, in her perception, was not the case at the „srub”: If it would be a bigger party and they would be there I would not have to think about them. The srub is gonna have a lot of things a usual party has but maybe the fact that we are such a small group and we know each other, at some point it's gonna be for me more uncomfortable. This is why I was thinking about going even this time. This is how I think about parties. I think about the dynamics. And because I and V. we cook and we clean and not everybody does that, so I was like 'Ok, I will be cleaning and cooking and making these facilities and then I have to hang around some people I don't feel comfortable with and I am gonna have to worry about there happiness. And if these N. and D. dynamics is still like this honeymoon vibes, I gonna have to worry all the time about W. if she is good and she is not like...she didn't leave somewhere because she doesn't know what is happening to her. And there is gonna be this M. whom I think is a liar and I don't really trust him. Who else is there for me? Good music and drugs? (personal communication, June 5, 2021)

From this excerpt it is apparent that the occasion encompassed complex issues for Meesha. Her values conflicted with the practices she found herself engaged in, and it seemed that slowly led to her leaving the group.

„Temporary, creative, and utopian”

In the final part of this chapter, I intend to see if escape from time and space were possible within the framework of the „substitute” activities.

To start with, the „srub” was an ideal place for creating a TAZ: in a village where nobody knows us, surrounded by nature, indoors

The walls are decorated with two 2x3 meters textiles, depicting meditating people who are surrounded and even filled with elements of nature, some of their limbs at a closer look turn out to be animals, the entire picture has fractals as background, not only the background, there are fractals everywhere. (fieldnotes from December 30, 2020) (Figure 14)

Everything was given. Substances were available. And in my view, it was achieved. The party had its problems, but they were all intrinsic. We built a miniature society there for a very short time. As the testimonies showed, a dysfunctional one, but it nevertheless happened. Meesha admitted that it is not easy to organise a house party when the participants have different tastes. And since usually we do not choose our friends only based on their music preferences, Meesha said:

We talked about having a dance party but I don't know...it won't really work I think. Or you need to get together only the people who really want to dance. But then you have to agree on the music. So it is just like...kind of difficult. It is easier for me to watch a film together and then talk about it and open a glass of wine. (personal communication, May 25, 2021)

Andre did not attend illegal raves, but he expressed compassion towards people missing parties because he admitted the role of raves in self-expression and in getting out of the cycle of normality for a while, which can have a healing effect on the party attendees:

And this goes again to kind of being yourself, how much you wanna expose yourself, how much you wanna play a certain role maybe, and living out an attitude, an image, how you dress, what makeup you might use, all these things, and I think cultural events like nightlife also for a lot of people have a function to really let go, to sometimes even maybe forget about bad feelings or torment or something like that, to use it as a ventile given maybe the stuff they are dealing with in their so-called day-life or real life.

For him, revealing vulnerability was another critical feature of the pre-COVID-19 parties, and he was missing it during the lockdown and from the „substitute” gatherings. He identified the reason for people controlling themselves, similarly to Meesha, in the small number of attendees:

I enjoy sometimes that people make themselves a bit more vulnerable, showing their real self, or how they want to see themselves. And I guess that is also harder if you have a more limited number of people around or something like that.

N: Yeah, but it is somehow strange. In theory, if you could have all the people around you being friends, in a small number, then it would be more logical to show your vulnerability, but yeah, it kind of works the other way, right?

A: Yeah, exactly. You are also less anonymous and more exposed. Yeah, that is the other side of it, yeah. (personal communication, June 1, 2021)

Albeit it was different from the above-described occasions, we managed to create our tiny safe place in Riegrovy sady. We marked our territory (Heřmanský, 2020, p. 193) with our jackets, bags and blankets, sitting close to each other in a circle. We cancelled out the „real life” where

police are going around, bench-to-bench and inspecting if people had their masks put on. Almost nobody did, of course. But the police seem to mean no harm, they do not want to engage in conflict. And it would be pointless. Everybody have a mask with them, just not on their face. And people, after being asked to do so, cover their faces. It is a big theatre: everybody is pleased on the surface.

Nóra: It is ridiculous. From midnight it is allowed to be without a mask outside, and we will be officially allowed to meet. As if the situation would change completely in a couple of hours.

Andre: Welcome to the Czech Republic, nothing really makes sense a long time ago. (fieldnotes from April 11, 2021)

Between the borders of our little TAZ, wearing masks was not necessary, and we could meet without the risk of a fine. At least that afternoon, we wanted to believe so.

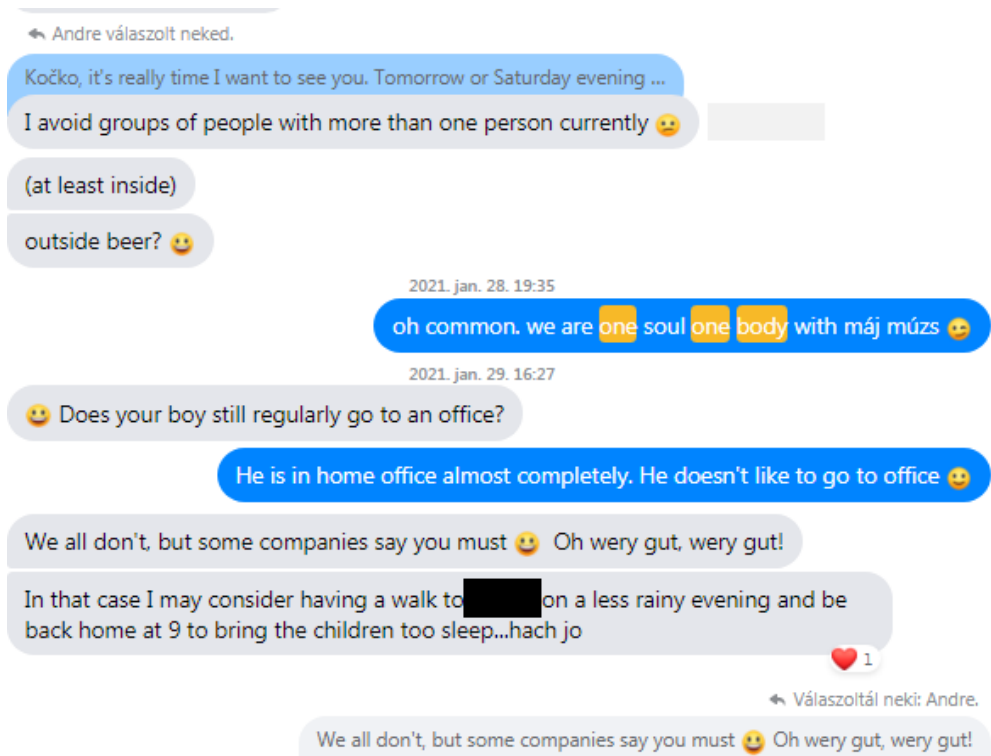


Figure 13



Figure 14

Discussion

After presenting the findings of my ethnographic research, in this chapter I will outline the changes the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing measures caused in my informants' (Meesha, Andre, Jan and Pavel) practices, values and feeling of belonging to the Prague electronic dance music scene.

Except for the „true party-goer” Jan, the others identified as „regular party-goers”. I wanted to inquire if there is a difference between the two groups on the level of practice and value. Turner (1969) located *communitas* in the liminal and transitory. Durkheim (1995) argued that collective effervescence can be a dangerous state, destructive force but eventually reinforces membership in society. Building on them, Olaveson (2004) coined the term „connectedness” as a phenomenon of liminal/effervescence collectivity. Femke Vandenberg et al. argue, that „Although much sociological work on collective effervescence and ritual theory is inspired by religious ceremonies, this can easily be extended to secular encounters such as music concerts.” (2020, p. 3). In my research, I identified multiple practices which were aiming towards collectivity.

In the first part of the chapter dedicated to presenting the findings of my fieldwork, the mapped activities were mostly connected to socialization (talking, meeting new people), dancing, and consuming a variety of psychoactive substances. On the intersection of these the unexpected, carnivalesque (Danton, 2020), self-representation, and exploring/watching constituted the central activities. The party being an intrinsically bodily experience, where all the senses are involved, it was not surprising that the practices of the interviewees orbited around the notion of the body. The words „physical”, „real” and „senses” were recurrent in the discourse of my informants. It seemed that there was no significant difference between the true and the regular party attendees. However, interesting contradictions were revealed. The participation for each individual constituted of a unique mixture of the above-enumerated practices. They balanced between collective and individual during the time they spent in the scene. Self-contained, meditative phases alternated with extrovert moments when individuals actively searched for connection with the others around them. My aim was to testify the framework of Olaveson (2004) against my data to find out whether „connectedness” is a workable term to describe the party and the experience of the participants within. I was not only interested in the activities/practices of the people but also in the values mobilized. These were good music quality, safety, freedom, disappearance, belonging and relaxation/escape

from the mundane. Interesting to see, how, similarly to the practices, some of these were connected to the body. The first corpus of the research proved Olaveson's findings since the five criteria of „connectedness” could be successfully localised. However, critical to emphasise the complexity of these practices and participation. They were all, albeit similar, idiosyncratic. In my view, it is essential to see that any given crowd is formed from individuals, who connect, share, and trespass the realm of *communitas* and collective effervescence, but they never cease to be separate beings, reflecting on their part played within the community and being fully aware of the temporary aspect of these occasions. They do not construct their identities around the participation in the scene but capitalize on it to re-connect with the „normality” of the everyday.

In the second part of the „Findings” chapter, I explored the strategies of online participation. My findings fit into the discoveries of scholars and other writers dedicated to the scene. The community online faced several difficulties, since the focal part, the body, the „real/physical” was missing, at least in the sense it was constituted before. The live streams of DJs on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram or on Youtube were more „other” (and at the moment only legal) options for scene participation rather than precursors of the future (Lhooq, 2020, para. 24). My informants expressed their disappointment about these online variations of the parties: they missed the possibilities encoded in the places themselves and most importantly, they missed the crowd. To experience something as „live” you have to be willing to accept the claim for the interaction of the other entity. In the case of my interviewees, the message was not, or just partially was, delivered. They interacted with the offered online platforms and with other scene members through them, but my informants were not willing to accept it as „real”. It can be seen from the way they narrated their experiences: setting the offline parties, labelled as „real” against the online ones, denoted as „virtual”. As Heřmanský (2020, p. 173) and Tófalvy (2008; 2011) argued, „virtual” involuntarily carries the notion of „not being real”. Musicians from different countries and continents tried to negotiate the novel situation of the „gone gigs” (Jeannotte, 2021) in order to maintain their connection with the audiences (Warren, 2020; McGuinness, 2020). However, as it was echoed in the scholarship, party attendees around the world welcomed the live streams and virtual reality parties with moderate enthusiasm, often only using them as another sites for music listening and maybe for brief communication in the comment section, but very rarely fully engaging into the provided worlds. Scene participants were re-enacting their prior party practices in a written form or by using emojis, but these conversations barely exceeded a

couple of question-response exchanges. (LeBlanc Liederman, 2020; Vandenberg et al., 2020; Lhooq, 2020; Kocay, 2020; von Rosen, 2020; Simao & Guerra, 2020; Assiter, 2020).

However, the apparent failure of the live streams does not mean that online participation as a whole was impossible and all scene-related practices were cancelled out by COVID-19. There were other ways than watching DJ sets. My informants read articles about- and financially supported venues. The sadness over frozen party life was a topic they discussed using online platforms. They shared links leading to music, streams and events with each other. They stayed in touch. The pandemic on its own right constructed a situation of liminality when the entire humanity had to overcome difficulties previously unknown, or long forgotten. Within this framework, the party attendees' practices and values remained decodable along with the criteria of „connectedness". Nevertheless, I must be aware of the amplified individualistic nature of the situation. Connectedness many times turned into its mirrored reflection, attendees talking about what is not there anymore, what is missing. Their connection to the scene often was reduced to a monogamous relationship (they personally and the abstract notion of the scene) as opposed to the hedonistic, tribal connection (they and the scene understood as a collection of other individuals). However, feelings, even if negatives, were involved. Katrin Döveling, Anu Harju and Denise Sommer (2018) explored how emotions are working as shaping agents of online communities. They identified the success of the formation of such groups in the degree of similarity in the responses a given issue elicited from various individuals and connected them to each other. I have to repeat that the COVID-19 pandemic is precisely a situation of this kind: it pushed us to unite ideologically and emotionally with complete strangers, and collectively hate those who happened to unite around the opposing interpretation of the very same phenomenon (E.g. those who want the vaccine and those who do not. We can share memes - funny photos with short captions - on our Facebook page edited by somebody from the other corner of the planet, without ever talking to that person, nevertheless, we are communicating and engaging in a relationship with them.). Furthermore, the framework of „digital affect cultures" works on a smaller scale as well, and it is applicable to describe how scene participants refusing to accept the online streams as „live" (Auslander, 2012) at the same time co-operate in the formation of „liveness", and the culture itself by commenting below the videos and (ironically) re-living the practices of the offline parties. They unite in hate towards the current, love for the past and hope for the future situation.

In the third part of the analysis, I elaborated on the „substitute activities” of Meesha, Andre, Jan and Pavel. They all tried to navigate through the restrictions in a way it is responsible but viable. The meetups they/we organised were centred around social interaction (talking), listening to music, and substance intake. Dancing was not important during these occasions anymore, given the technical and subjective barriers. My interviewees agreed that the proper, big setting is a necessary condition for the party to happen. The feeling of being invisible in a crowd turned to be focal, just as the presence of strangers. Meetings in a small setting easier gave room to conflicts since there was no chance to hide and the already established relationships affected the interaction between the participants. Consequently, the values previously attached to the party were harder to maintain in a limited setup. However, the features of Olaveson’s theory were present and these occasions could be described as „connectedness”, albeit not much with the scene but within the scene - with one’s friends.

Conclusion

Even though I divided the corpus of my data into three sections in order to better reveal the differences between online and offline before- and during the pandemic, I argue that these are all interwoven and intertwined. The key to understanding the phenomenon is the invisibility of the technologies we use. They do not constitute distinct realities but are inseparably blended with the offline. Two sides of the same coin (Heřmanský, 2020; Tófalvy, 2008; 2011). Even though my informants were not aware, they simultaneously utilized and relied on the possibilities of both the online and the offline in order to stay connected to the scene and their friends from there. The COVID-19 related measures pushed them into an unprecedented situation and encouraged them to navigate between their previous drives and practices and the limitation and possibilities of the new, and if needed overwrite their old values to match the needs of the bigger group: society. The differences I noted between their pre-pandemic and current practices were rooted in the shaping power of the situation, and not much in the major change in their values. Those were less affected, albeit tuned to a more risk assessing note. Furthermore, values often were directly revealed and addressed during interaction (e.g. the fierce debate over Transmission for Palestine; the exclusion of a member from the „srub”), since there were limiting factors (technical in nature) for dancing/good music quality, but not that much for talking/communication, and it was harder to „choose not to socialize”, to quote Pavel, than in a club.

The participation, practices and values of my informants unfolded in this paper definitely carry the characteristics of connectedness, in all the pre-COVID-19 and pandemic settings. The differences can be located in the limitations of the given conditions and not in the (lack) of the willingness of scene members. Nevertheless, it would be romanticizing and overlooking the nuances if not taken into account the clearly individualistic nature of these activities at times, and the distinct, often conflicting values and ideas Pavel, Andre, Jan and Meesha represented in particular situations (e.g. Jan’s rage against the regulations versus Andre’s approach to following them tightly; the normality of substance use in the eyes of Pavel contra the stress Meesha experienced about it).

For further research the possible differences between the techno and psytrance scenes might be fruitful. Sometimes my informants, when talking about participation and to some extent the strength of belonging, marked those scenes as opposing in their narratives. However to be able to prove this intuition, deeper and focused research is required. The

limitation of this current study did not allow the probation of the theory in practice. Furthermore, the relatively small size of my sample did not allow me to generalize my findings. On the other hand, it was never my intention. I wanted to provide genuine insight into the scene participation of ordinary party-lovers, like myself. I believe that the depth of my research can balance out what is lacking in width, and it can inspire others to further investigate the effect of COVID-19 on the scene.

I started with a quote from a „true party-goer”, therefore to complete the frame, I will conclude my thesis with Jan’s words. I believe that no matter how they labelled themselves, Pavel, Meesha and Andre would agree with him, and so I. When I interviewed him, he greeted me with the following words:

Jan: There is only one important stuff: „Let us party again!” I can just repeat it: „Let us party again! Let us party again!” And you can just copy it. I will answer this to your every question, so you can just write down the questions and copy the answers: „Let us party again, please!” No, no „please”... but „otherwise I am goint to... to... to... the streets. destroy the cars and fight the police!” (personal communication, June 8, 2021).

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Figure 6 – 12 –personal Facebook Messenger communication, screenshots, 2021

Figure 14 – photo taken by the author, 2020

Appendices

Appendix 1. – Questions for online survey

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the audience (party-goers) of the Prague electronic music scene

I am Gere Nóra and I am a student at Charles University, Faculty of Humanities. As part of my MA thesis, I am researching the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the audience (party-goers) of the Prague electronic music scene. I am looking for answers from individuals who attended both physical and virtual/online events which took place in Prague and were organised by Prague based musicians, crews or venues.

Please describe your personal perspective and experience in as much detail as possible - what did you do (or not), how did you feel, what aspects of the events are the most important to you.

All your answers will be handled confidentially and used only for the scientific purposes of my research.

The questionnaire takes approximately 15-20 minutes to answer.

Partying before the Covid-19 pandemic

1. Please describe a typical party experience from the pre-Covid-19 times in as much detail as possible - what did you do (or not), how did you feel, what aspects of the event are the most important to you.
2. Before Covid-19 restrictions what best describes how often you went to electronic music parties in Prague?
3. How did you hear about these events?
4. Please name a few organizer crews or physical venues whose physical events you more often attended.
5. Please list 3-5 activities in which you usually participate during a party (dancing, consuming alcohol or other substances, communicating with people, etc).

Virtual/online events during the pandemic restrictions

In Czech Republic the restrictions on social gathering and cultural events were in place between March and May 2020 and from October 2020 to May 2021.

1. Please describe your experience and impressions of a virtual/online event (rave, live stream, virtual reality party, etc.) you participated in - in as much detail as possible - what did you do (or not), how did you feel, what aspects of the event are the most important to you, whether you had any expectations.
2. What best describes how often you joined these virtual/online events?
3. How did you hear about these events?
4. Please name a few organizer crews or physical venues whose virtual/online events you more often attended.
5. Please list 3-5 activities in which you participated during the virtual/online events (dancing, consuming alcohol or other substances, communicating with people, working, etc).
6. What worked well with virtual/online events for you?
7. What did not?
8. Which aspects of physical events are important to you that virtual/online events do not offer?
9. Would you pay to participate in the virtual/online events you described? If yes, why?
10. If you answered no, please explain your reason(s).
11. Would you still participate in virtual/online events if physical events took place?
12. Please state one reason why you would or would not participate.

Secret raves

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you miss attending physical electronic music parties?
2. During the time when social gathering and cultural events were officially banned, have you tried other physical events to replace the missing experience?
3. If your answer is yes, in what form?
4. If you answered yes, what best describes how often you engaged in these activities?
5. How did you hear about these events?

Personal information

Your age

Your gender

Thank you very much for your time and help!

If you would like to share your view and comments on the survey, feel free to contact me via e-mail: noragere@yahoo.com.

See you soon on the dancefloor :)

Appendix 2. – Outline for questions for in-person interviews

1. Personal info – your position in the scene, genre you prefer.
2. Talk about your party experience – preference, genres, artists, what was important, why do you like to go, with or without friends, how long you stay, what do you consume, anything that is an important part of a party for you.
3. What changed with Corona? – what streams you followed if any (names) what did you do meanwhile, did you try to make it an „experience” – similar to the physical ones?
4. Any FB groups, group chats you are in connection to the scene, donations, was music/parties/missing parties a topic in your personal conversations?
5. Substitute – hanging out with friends, house parties, illegal parties – how, why, what did you do?

Appendix 3. – Date and length of interviews

1. Meesha, first occasion – May 25, 2021 – 01:04:48
2. Andre – June 1, 2021 – 53:52
3. Meesha, secon occasion – June 5, 2021 – 41:45
4. Jan – June 8, 2021 – 01:34:19
5. Pavel, first occasion – June 12, 2021 – 40:37
6. Pavel, second occasion – June 17, 2021 – 39:11

Appendix 3. – Date of fieldwork

1. December 30, 2020 – January 1, 2021
2. March 13, 2021 – Diera do sveta – online stream

3. March 27, 2021 – house party
4. April 11, 2021 – Riegrovy sady